

THE NEW JACK CAFFERY THRILLER

'Terrifying'

Karin Slaughter

MO

'Stunning'

Tess Gerritsen

HAYDER



WOLF

**SHE'S LOCKED THE DOORS
BUT THE KILLER'S INSIDE . . .**

ABOUT THE BOOK

'I believe, from what I can hear, that either my daughter or my wife has just been attacked. I don't know the outcome. The house is silent.'

Fourteen years ago two teenage lovers were brutally murdered in a patch of remote woodland. The prime suspect confessed to the crimes and was imprisoned.

One family is still trying to put the memory of the killings behind them. But at their isolated hilltop house, the nightmare is about to return. . .

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Also by Mo Hayder

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WOLF

MO HAYDER

Part One

Picking Elderflowers in the Evening, Near Litton, Somerset

AMY IS FIVE years old and in all of those five years she's never seen Mummy acting like this before. Mummy's in front of her on the grass, standing in a weird way, as if she's been frozen by one of those ice guns that the man in *The Incredibles* have got in his hand most of the time. She's on one leg, with one arm out, like she's been running and got told to stop and stay still as a statue. Her mouth is open too and her face is white. It would be really funny if her eyes weren't all opened up and weird, the way her face goes when she's looking at something scary on the television. Behind her is a line of fluffy white clouds in the sky - like on *The Simpsons* - except the sky's a bit darker - because it's nearly night time.

'Amy?' After a while Mum puts her foot down. Stops balancing on it. She does this funny little sideways dance like a puppet what's about to fall over, and when she gets her balance again her face changes. 'AMY?'

She starts running and as she runs she's screaming, 'Brian!?! Brian I've found her. *Brian?* Come NOW. I've found her. Over here in the trees.'

Before Amy can say anything Mum has grabbed her up. She's still screaming out to Dad, 'Brian Brian *Brian,*' and she's hugging Amy the way she hugged her that day she was about to go into the road and almost got squished by a bus, which Mum says is the most scary thing that ever happened to her, but Amy didn't think was even *half* as scary as the Puzzler man off of *Numberjacks* on CBeebies.

'Where've you *been?*' Mum puts her back down on the ground with a bump. She squats and runs her hands up and down her arms and legs, straightening her blue dress and pushing her hair out of her face. Staring at her, all worried. 'Amy? *Amy*, are you all right? Are you all right, darling?'

'I'm all right, Mummy. Why?'

'Why?' Mum shakes her head, like the times when Dad says something really stupid. '*Why?* Oh baby, baby, baby. My baby.' She closes her eyes, drops her head against Amy's chest and squeezes her. It's a really hard hug and Amy can feel her insides squishing up, but she doesn't want to squiggle away coz it might upset Mum.

'Amy!' Dad comes running along the path. The field is very big and very green and sloping and all the people from the cars that were parked here before have got out and they're all standing staring at her. 'AMY?' Dad's not carrying the container they were putting their flowers into any longer, instead he's got his phone in his hand. He's taken off his nice jumper and his shirt's all wet and yucky under the armpits. Mum says that's where he leaks when he runs too fast so he must of been running for a long time. His face is just like Mum's, all white and scared, and Amy wants to laugh a bit, coz they do look funny both of them, all white like Halloween masks, except it's hard to tell if Dad's really cross or really sad.

'Where were you? Where have you been?' His voice is really shouty. 'How many times have I told you not to go out of our sight?' He turns and yells at the people over at the cars. 'We've found her. We've found her.' Then he turns back to Amy. He's cross, definitely cross - you can tell by how squinty his eyes have gone. 'You've been ages, you've made your mother cry now. This is the last time we pick elderflowers. The *last* time.'

'Brian, be quiet. She's all right, that's the main thing.'

'Is she?' He puts a hand on Mum's shoulder and moves her out of the way so he can bend and look into Amy's face.

His eyes go up and down and side to side, taking in every inch. 'Are you all right? Amy? Where've you been? Have you spoken to anyone?'

She bites her lip. Her head feels all nasty and hot and there are some tears in her eyes that fall out of under her eyelids and go running down her cheeks.

'Amy?' Dad shakes her arm. 'Did you speak to anyone?'

'Only the man. That's all.'

Dad goes all funny when she says this. Suddenly his hands aren't nice any more but are like bird's claws, digging into Amy's arms. 'The *man*?'

'Yes.'

Mum's mouth starts quivering. The black make-up stuff on her eyes has gone runny and it's all trickling down her face. 'I told you we shouldn't be out here at this time of day, Brian, this is when they all come out - all of them. And we're not far from the Donkey Pitch. Remember? The Donkey Pitch?'

'What *man*?' Dad says. 'Amy, tell me in the most grown-up way you can, because this is serious. What man?'

She turns towards the woods, lifting her hand to point. But as she does she sees that he's gone - the man who likes dogs. He's gone away. And he must of taken the puppy, coz that's gone too.

'He was really cute.'

'Cute?' Mum says. '*Cute*?'

'The puppy was called Bear.'

'The puppy?'

'Oh, for God's sake!' Dad rubs hard at his forehead.

'There's always a puppy. Always a shagging puppy.'

'Brian, *please*.'

'It's the oldest trick in the book: *I've got a poorly puppy - come into the woods and I'll show you*. We're taking her to the police. She needs an examination.'

Amy frowns. The man in the woods didn't say that the puppy was poorly, and he didn't ask her to come into the

woods to look at it. She was the one what found the puppy, before she met the man.

‘I don’t want no exam, Mum – I don’t want one of them.’

‘See, Brian, you’ve scared her. Now, Amy . . .’ Mum sits down on the grass. She pats her leg. ‘Come here, sweetie. Sit down.’

Amy sits on Mum’s lap. She wipes her nose with her hand. Sniffs up the rest of the snot, which is yucky. She wishes Dad wasn’t cross – she doesn’t understand why he’s cross, coz the man wasn’t horrid. He looked a bit funny, with a big hairy beard like a goblin, or like a Santa Claus in reverse, because his beard was black, but he spoke to her very *very* nice and made her a promise, a proper pinkie-promise which everyone in the world knows is the most proper. And another thing is that he called her Crocus, which was the bit she liked the best – when he said she was as pretty as a crocus. Because crocuses are really pretty and they’re sometimes purple and sometimes yellow and sometimes both. Miss Redhill at school says they’re the second flower of spring after the snowdrops have died and gone back into the ground.

‘Amy,’ Mum asks. ‘This man . . . was he nice to you?’

‘Yes. And he was nice to the puppy.’

‘Was it his puppy?’

‘No.’

‘Then whose puppy was it?’

‘I don’t know.’ She puts her finger in her nose and picks it thoughtfully. She thinks that maybe the puppy wasn’t a puppy for real but a grown-up dog – sometimes a big dog can be little if it’s a puppy and sometimes an old dog can be smaller than an puppy, even though it’s really lots older. It’s all about something called ‘breeds’ what can be small or big. ‘He came after I found the puppy. I just said that, didn’t I?’

Dad straightens up. ‘Come on. Show me where you found this puppy.’

Mum lets Amy jump off her lap. She holds her hand as they walk into the trees. It's a bit more spooky in the wood coz it's dark in here now. But she can see Dad's white shirt, and Mum does that thing as they go, with her hand, where she squeezes Amy's thumb to let her know everything's OK. Amy squeezes her hand in return.

Amy takes Mum and Dad to the place she met the puppy. It's getting really nighttime now and the trees are all silent and dark. No puppy. The man made a promise to take the puppy somewhere safe.

'I was here,' she says. 'And I was putting the flowers in the . . . There it is!' She sees the Tupperware container. She goes and picks it up and turns round to show Mum and Dad all the flowers inside. Which are the best flowers without none of them worms like the ones Dad found earlier.

'I was only getting the flowers off of here and I was getting the flowers and this puppy comes up and he's got a poorly paw.'

'A poorly paw?' Dad looks at Mum with his eyebrows all arched.

'Yes, with blood and stuff. And the person of it wasn't there and the man didn't know who the grown-up of the puppy was neither, so I was going oh puppy puppy and I was going to bring it back to you, Daddy, because if it didn't have a nowner, it needed to be—'

'*An owner,*' Mum says.

'An owner,' Amy repeats. 'And if it didn't have *an owner* then it needed one and I thought that it could of lived at our house, under the cooker - coz there's that place that gets really warm, and I don't mind giving it my pocket money, Mum, to buy it some milk.'

Mum wipes her eyes and laughs a little. Which is nice. She hasn't laughed at all since all of this happened.

'Amy . . .' She gives her a hug. More gentle this one. 'He didn't touch you, Amy, did he? Did he ask you to do anything you didn't like?'

Amy sucks her fingers for a while. They taste of grass and the stems off of the flowers. She wishes she could of kept the puppy.

'Amy? Did he ask you to do anything you didn't like?'

'No. *He didn't do nothing.* He was nice to me and he's going to help the puppy. Honest, Mum. Honest.'

Dad lets out his breath in a long sound like a balloon what's had a pin put in it. He shakes his head. He tucks the phone back in his pocket and stands up and walks around a bit with his back to Amy and Mum, shouting into the woods.

'Hello? Hello - do you want to come and have a chat with me? Any puppies you want to talk about, you fucker?'

There's a long long silence. Then he comes back and it's amazing coz Mum doesn't say anything about the rude word he just said.

'Come on, let's go - you should have been in bed hours ago.'

Mum takes Amy's hand and they follow Dad back to the van - Dad's white van he drives for work. Amy uses her thumbnail to try to get rid of the green stains what's got themselves all over the inside bits of her hands. The flowers here are supposed to be very puffy, which is why they've come here today, and you can make really really nice drinks out of them if you put in enough sugar, but that takes a grown-up because of the heat and how hot it gets. Hot enough to make your finger fall off if you put it into the saucepan. With blood and everything.

Amy's teddy, Buttons, is on the front seat. She clambers in after Mum and snatches Buttons up, holding him to her face to get his fluffiness on her. When Dad turns the engine on with the keys, Amy moves the seat belt around so she can kneel up, put her nose to the window and looks back at the woods. Mum doesn't stop her.

Dad drives the van off of the grass and on to the road. It's bumpy going along and Amy bounces around, but she

doesn't stop watching the trees. She wonders if the reverse Santa Claus man will find the puppy's owners.

When the van gets further up the road and she can't see the trees any more and can only see the road and the other cars and buildings whizzing past, she sits down and gets the seat belt more comfortable. She puts Buttons in her lap. He looks up at her with his nose what needs mending and his bad paw, just like the puppy.

'Mummy,' she says when they get to the place that's at the end of their road, the place where someone has sprayed a picture of a Moshling on to the road sign. 'Mummy what word does it make if you put that "huh" letter Miss Redhill makes when she puffs on her hand—'

'Aitch you mean?' says Mum.

'Yeah - what happens if you put Aitch next to eggy "e" and lollipop "el" and the puh sound. You know, that letter you make when you blow out candles on your birthday cake? Puh?'

'Aitch, EE, Ell and Peee?' Mum says. 'That spells "help". Why?'

'Help?'

'Yes.'

'And what about umbrella "Uh", and snakey "Sssss"?'

'You and Esss? That spells "Us". Help us.' Mum looks down at Amy, a puzzled smile on her face. 'Help us? Why? Why are you asking that?'

Amy bites her lip. Something was sellotaped on the puppy-dog's collar. A teeny-weeny piece of paper what had been writed on in blue pen. It was all torn and the letters were all smudged and spread into big blue pools so you couldn't read them properly. Except for those letters.

Help us.

'Amy? Why're you asking?'

Amy looks at the side of Dad's head. If she mentions puppy-dog again, Dad's going to start shouting. So she shakes her head.

'Nothing,' she says as they pull up outside the house. She wishes she had a little puppy-dog. And different parents. Parents what would not get cross when she told them things what are true. 'Nuffink.'

Earlier that Morning: the Pig Man

THE PIG MAN. That's how Oliver Anchor-Ferrers views himself. Like something lifted whole from the pages of a Victorian bestiary. Nine weeks ago the doctors in the Mayo Clinic in London gave him drugs to thin the blood. They opened his pericardium with stainless-steel rib retractors, connected multiple cannulas to his body and rerouted his blood to mechanical membrane oxygenators which carried out the job his heart should have been doing, delivering oxygen to his tissues and organs. His own heart the medics stopped by injecting a cardioplegic solution to induce paralysis. For almost an hour on the operating table Oliver was dead. Once they'd cut out the valves he'd had from birth and replaced them with valves from a specially bred pig, the surgeons closed the aorta and secured the sternum with steel wire. In spite of his appearance – that of a perfectly normal man in his sixties – the truth is that Oliver Anchor-Ferrers is being kept alive by a piece of foreign flesh flickering inside his heart. He's half man, half swine.

Valve replacement is a common enough procedure, an operation that's been in use for years – there must be several thousand pig-men walking the planet, by his reckoning – but Oliver can't rest easy about it. Since the moment he woke in the ward he has been listening to his pulse, wondering how it is linked to his brain and whether the mechanical, ancient survival parts of his cerebellum have yet recognized the foreignness. Since the op he lies in bed at night listening to it thrum-thrumming in his chest. He wonders what control he has over it. He wonders who is choosing to live – him or the pig.

Keep beating, he sometimes whispers under his breath, Pig-heart, keep beating . . .

Oliver is sixty-four and he is worth several million pounds. England is his native country –he owns two properties here. His chief home, a Regency end-of-terrace, is in Knightsbridge. But it is in the second, where he is now, a rambling Victorian house set high on a hill in the Somerset Mendips, that he feels most at home. His favourite chair, scruffy and old and moulded to his skeleton, is in its usual place, next to the inglenook. He’s been looking forward to this chair for what seems like ages. It’s taken almost two months for the London doctors to give him the all-clear to come down here.

He stretches out his legs and settles back, gazing around in contentment. The fire isn’t made, not now that it’s summer, and there is a basket of dried flowers in the hearth to fill the space. But all the familiar hallmarks of a family visit are here. They left London at the crack of dawn and arrived late morning and it’s a typical first day, passed in amiable chaos. Everywhere are dotted the groceries and bits and pieces that Matilda brings down from London: endless Waitrose bags and papery deli bundles and boxes of cereals and fruit juices. The only unwelcome addition is his pale pink medication tray on the windowsill.

Matilda comes hurrying in from the boot-room, all colour and fragrance. She is dressed in her blue-and-pink gardening apron – the one Kiran gave her years ago. She’s tying a spotty-print tool pouch to her waist and Oliver notes that, as is her custom, she has wiped her face of London make-up. Instead of postbox-red lipstick and foundation her skin is bare and peach coloured. Her lips are their natural soft pink, like the inside of a fig. Matilda is sixty, and grey now, but her skin is as clear as a cloudless sky, and when Oliver looks at her the light still does the same strange dance around her that it has always done, from the moment they first met all those years ago.

‘Sweetheart.’ She stops and smiles at Oliver. It’s a smile that conveys everything: love and pity and a shared desperation that it’s come to this – to heart surgery and medication in numbered boxes. ‘Sweetheart, do you mind if I . . .?’

She wants to go into the garden. It’s less than half an hour since they’ve arrived and already she wants to be outside. In the twenty-eight years they’ve owned this house she has poured her heart into the flowers, shrubs and borders. He smiles. ‘You must, darling. In fact, I think I can hear the plants calling you.’

‘Are you sure you’re all right?’

‘Of course, of course, I am perfectly fine.’

Matilda finishes tying the belt and leans over him. She slides her hand into his shirt, presses the palm coolly across the scar on his chest.

‘How’s it feeling?’

‘It’s behaving.’

‘Not grunting? Not squeaking or squealing? Doctor says I’ve got to listen out, especially for the squealing.’

He presses his fingers over hers and holds her hand tighter to his chest so she can feel the thud thud thud down there.

‘Good.’ She takes a moment to button up his shirt, smoothing it until she’s satisfied. She kisses his head. ‘Nurse Matilda’s a bit of a dragon, so get ready for the regime. Drink your tea, pills in three hours. And that cake’ll be ready in twenty minutes, so I’ll be back.’

She leaves the room, rummaging in the tool belt for secateurs. He watches her straight back, her refined profile. No one would know how tender she is inside. Just like no one would look at him and think there were pig parts keeping him alive.

‘You all right?’

He looks up. Lucia is sitting in the window seat, the kitchen table pulled up close, drawings and magazines and

poems spread out everywhere. The sun is spilling in behind her, catching all the highlights in her spiky black hair. Her skin is white, and her eyes are outlined so many times with make-up they make deep smudged holes in her skull. She's studying him in her challenging way. Steady and dark. He and Matilda call it 'the Lucia look'. Lucia might be nearly thirty, but she still behaves like a sullen teenager.

'Yes. Why?'

'Just . . .'

 She puffs out a bored breath. Shrugs. 'You know, just think I've got to ask. Be polite.'

She goes back to her work and Oliver watches her scribble and scratch her head, poring over her books, every few moments reaching automatically for one of the black grapes that sit in the bowl in front of her. Bear, their Border terrier, is asleep under the table, half draped across Lucia's feet. Bear doesn't look like a bear at all, more a small teddy with unevenly set ears that have to be cut differently to make them sit parallel. She is little but she runs like the wind and has to be tied up the first day they arrive here. She's got a habit of making a bolt for it, heading for the forests, so she's wearing her collar. The lead is under the leg of Lucia's chair, Bear's head is resting on Lucia's boots - Doc Martens with pastel trolls' faces covering them. Ridiculous children's cartoons, all over her feet.

Oliver picks up his cup of tea and sips slowly. The familiar musty tartan blanket he loves so much is over his legs, there's the smell of Matilda's cake in the oven and he's holding tea in the chipped mug she sometimes uses when she's gardening. It's got a cheesy photo of Kiran and Lucia on it, their arms around the old golden retriever they used to have when they were children. A year ago he wouldn't have drunk from this mug, he'd have been embarrassed by its sentimentality.

'Oliver.'

Matilda has reappeared in the doorway, secateurs still in her hand. Her expression is no longer calm - it is wary and

alarmed. Immediately the pig valve flutters.

‘Yes?’ he says guardedly.

At the table Lucia lifts her chin and stares curiously at her mother. ‘Mum?’

‘Oliver,’ Matilda says, levelly, ignoring her daughter. ‘Have you got a moment? A chat?’

‘What sort of chat?’ Lucia says.

Matilda won’t meet her daughter’s eye. Instead she tips her head meaningfully at Oliver, suggesting they need to speak in private. With an effort he gets to his feet, ignoring the now familiar swoop of nausea that sudden movement brings. He clutches up the walking stick and crosses the room as fast as he can, feeling Lucia’s eyes on him all the way. When he draws level with the pantry Matilda puts a finger to her mouth and touches his wrist, pulling him out of the kitchen.

‘I’m so sorry,’ she whispers. ‘Sorry to do this to you. But you’ve got to see it. Or else I’ll think I’m going mad. I’m so sorry.’

Silently beckoning him to follow, she steps out of the back door. He moves after her, conscious of the air wheezing in and out of his lungs. *Keep breathing. Heart keep beating.*

Outside, the sun has almost reached its midday summit and is glaring down on the hilltop. Matilda puts a hand under his elbow to help him walk away from the house. They go slowly. In spite of its location, high up on the hill, surrounded on all four sides by sky, the garden feels more like a series of rooms than an open space. A path leads from walled garden to a walnut orchard, through a hedge into a formal knot garden, then through a gate to three descending parterres with crumbling, ornamented balustrade steps. One can wander through the areas in any imaginable sequence, from a paddock of grass that sways kneehigh, studded in the summer months by meadow flowers, to the moss-covered stone walls of the kitchen garden where giant rhubarbs spring from the ground like

fountains. It's a maze, a maze and a monument to Matilda's love. Her energy.

Every now and then the eye catches on a black spot. Like dots of fungus. Or a scatter of pathogens on a Petri dish. These are the places Lucia has sabotaged Matilda's colour scheme on the many occasions she comes back to live with them. She sneaks into the garden and secretly plants black tulips and blood-purple hellebores; her way of staking a claim on the property, making sure her mark is made. It drives Matilda mad and as soon as Lucia leaves home again, as soon as she's got her life back on track, Matilda takes the opportunity to weed out the offenders.

At the bottom of the flights of steps the land drops away, leading to a series of small, half-sunken coppices; from afar they resemble a puckered string in the landscape. At the first coppice Matilda lets go of his arm and hurries on ahead. He follows at a short distance, using his stick for support. She stops about twenty metres away in a small clearing where a rake leans against one of the trees. Next to it is a trug, cast aside, as if Matilda has been interrupted in the middle of picking up leaves.

'There.' She turns to him. Her grey hair is pulled back from her face, her lips aren't pink any more but white. The bottoms of her teeth where they meet the gums are visible. 'There. See what I mean? Or am I going mad?'

His eyes track back to the silver birches beyond her. He sees what is there and for a moment has to lean against a tree for support. Every muscle begins to shake.

It can't be. It just *cannot* be.

The Haunting

MATILDA ANCHOR-FERRERS believes the house is haunted. Not haunted in the conventional sense, by the spirit of the long dead, but haunted by the shared memory of an event that occurred fourteen years ago, when Kiran was sixteen and Lucia was just fifteen. It was, in Matilda's eyes, a watershed their lives. A happening that changed everything beyond repair. It happened on a summer's day, not unlike today. And in woods identical to these.

Lucia in particular hasn't recovered. She was the most affected and still carries the dark energy of those events, even now, which is why Matilda didn't ask her to come out here. She is the one who must be protected from the unbelievability of what her mother has found in the trees.

'Was it like this when you found it?' Oliver stands in the clearing, one hand wedged on the trunk of an elder to support himself. The sudden walk and the shock are etched in his face. 'Was it?'

'Yes. I was gathering up the leaves and I . . .' She trails off. She doesn't know what to say. 'I couldn't believe what I was seeing.'

'It's pure coincidence. Chance.'

'Coincidence?' she echoes. 'What sort of *coincidence*, Ollie?'

'Something's been brought down by an animal – it's just fluke the way it's . . .' He waves his hands vaguely at the bushes. He's trying to sound gruff, confident, but he looks as if he might be sick at any moment. 'The way it's ended up like that.'

‘What sort of animal would be big enough, tall enough to do something like—’

‘Mum?’

Matilda breaks off. Behind Ollie, standing timidly at the entrance to the copse – all black T-shirt and white skin – is Lucia. It’s hot out here but she’s wearing Ollie’s old Barbour as if she is cold. It swamps her, hanging to her knees.

‘Dad?’

Oliver sways away from the tree and turns awkwardly. ‘Lucia.’ He begins to walk painfully up the path towards her. Pointing to her with his walking stick. ‘Didn’t see you there. Let’s go back to the house.’

‘What’s going on?’

‘Nothing.’ Oliver puts out a hand to try to shield her view. To move her away. ‘It’s nothing. Go back to what you were doing.’

‘So fake.’ She tries to sidestep him, craning her neck to see down into the clearing. ‘I know you, Dad. You’re lying.’

Matilda comes forward, trying to block her view. ‘Lucia, darling, why don’t you go inside and get the cake out of the oven. It’s going to burn.’

But Lucia has seen it. ‘Oh,’ she says, her hand coming up to her mouth. ‘Oh, no.’

Matilda takes her daughter by the shoulders. Turns her bodily in the direction of the house. ‘Listen to me. Do as I told you. Go into the house and get the cake out of the oven. Your dad and I will deal with everything out here. It’s not what it looks like. All right? *Lucia?* Is that all right?’

The skin around Lucia’s mouth is blue. After a long time she nods numbly. She takes a stiff step towards the house, then another. Her head is down, her legs awkward and uncoordinated. Watching her go, Matilda feels that familiar pang of guilt . . . as if she’s somehow let her daughter down. Maybe every mother is like this and has one child destined to be a worry. For Matilda it’s not Kiran, it’s Lucia; she just can’t seem to settle in life. She’s started and ended careers

more times than can be counted – one minute she’s performing with a punk band, the next she’s designing clothes for a goth store – and as for boyfriends, well the rapidity with which they change leaves Matilda dizzy. Every time a job or relationship goes sour Lucia comes limping back home to lick her wounds. She’s been back with them for the last two months. Fate, of course, would put her here now, of all times.

Matilda raises her eyes to the house, with its dark walls built of the local blue lias. It’s a four-storey building, including the vast towers put in place by the second owner in the 1890s, hence its name: The Turrets. Dark as a crow. God, she thinks, they should have sold this place back when it all happened. But fourteen years ago there wasn’t a property in the area that would have sold – you couldn’t have given them away. People were superstitious and scared and nothing could induce them to come and live out here, especially in a location as remote as The Turrets. How long would it take the emergency services to get here? they asked. Look at that driveway – it must be more than half a mile long. And the nearest police station is in Compton Martin.

The sound of Lucia opening and slamming the back door punctuates the silence. Neither Matilda nor Oliver speak. Somewhere a bird sings, the breeze shifts the branches.

Eventually, certain that Lucia won’t come back, Matilda turns and stares at the mess, the way it’s been mingled and studded with plant matter and earth. It’s been here a while, more than a few hours she guesses from the shiny patina. Drying out in the heat. Bluebottles landing on it, some lingering. Laying eggs, she supposes.

Oliver rubs his nose. ‘I think we’re making too much of this.’

‘Are we?’

‘We know he can’t be back.’

‘We know, Oliver? Are you so sure of that?’

'Of course I'm sure.'

'Do we know he hasn't been let out? I mean, I haven't checked on him recently. Have you?'

Oliver huffs something about having other things on his mind. Not having time to check up on prisoners. 'I'm sure he can't be free. We'd have been told. Everyone would be talking about it.'

'Well, that's fine then.' She grabs the rake from where it leans against the tree, and turns for the house. 'That's fine, and of course I believe you. But I'm still going to call the police.'

The Reflection Grove

FIFTEEN MILES TO the east of the Anchor-Ferrers' house the weather is more troubled. Small clouds bump restlessly across the sky. The sun flashes on and off and sudden localized rainbursts punctuate the day. The West Wiltshire countryside is alive with birdsong and the new, acid greens of May. In a small grove on an otherwise deserted hillside, almost a hundred people have congregated. A middle-aged woman in towering stilettos, minidress and black veiled hat, holds centre stage on a beribboned platform. She appears to be holding back tears as she delivers a speech to the waiting journalists.

'Lots of people are going to come here just to think about their lives and stuff.' She opens her arms to indicate the grove they stand in, its bunting and flags and hospitality tables. 'It's a place for them to have a really good think about what's happening in their personal journey, so what the clinic and me have decided we're going to call it, is . . . the "Reflection Grove".'

Ooooooh, murmurs the crowd appreciatively. Clickety-click go the cameras.

'Yeah,' she says. 'The Reflection Grove. And I want to say thank you for this, from the bottom of my heart, thank you to everyone who made it happen. It would have meant everything to my beautiful daughter to know other people are going to get something out of her tragedy. It's so beautiful to be able to give something back.'

This is Jacqui Kitson. Two years ago her twenty-two-year-old daughter, then a minor celebrity, wandered away from a rehabilitation clinic located a mile away from this hilltop.

She'd taken a lethal mix of drugs and alcohol and, disorientated, she eventually collapsed and died at a spot right under the feet of the gathered journalists. Her body lay for several months before it was discovered among the leaves.

Jacqui Kitson has lived through the trauma and come out the other end. In its wake she's raised £15,000 through charitable donations to buy this glade on behalf of the clinic. A memorial for her daughter, a place for the residents of the clinic to come with their solitude and their thoughts. A willow-weave pagoda has been erected in the centre of the glade. On its lower floor are cutaway arches, with benches on the interior so that people can sit and gaze out at the view of the Wiltshire plains.

Ten current patients have attended the celebration. They wear an assortment of clothing, tracksuits, denim, trucker hats, and they stand in shuffling formation around the platform. The directors of the clinic are here too: three women in suits, each of them itchy with the desire to speak to the waiting journalists. Only one man doesn't want to be part of it. One man who stands alone, keeping his distance, set a little apart from the melee in a place shielded by the lofty birches. A place he can watch, not participate.

DI Jack Caffery is a CID officer in his mid forties. He is here out of duty, to show a police presence, but he will do anything to keep removed from this spectacle. He stands quite still, hands in his pockets, watching as people crowd around Jacqui Kitson. She smiles and nods and shakes hands. Poses for a photograph with one of the clinic directors. They hold up glasses to clink for the cameraman. Green tea, not champagne - this is, after all, a place to escape from the reach of intoxicants. Someone asks her to sit in the pagoda for photographs. She does this without blinking an eye, her hands resting demurely on her knees, her chin lifted in the direction of the sun.

Caffery is a seasoned detective; he has worked a lot of the country's most notorious and difficult cases. He has seen things, a lot of things and been in many situations that have made him uncomfortable. But he's never wanted to get away from something quite as much as he wants to get away from this.

Bear

THE ANCHOR-FERRERS ARE all back in the house. They've locked the doors and windows in a mood of subdued panic. Lucia watches Dad in the hallway, his head bent. He is using a butter knife to prise open the cordless phone and check the batteries, frowning because Mum's tried to call the police and inexplicably can't get a line. Sunlight is coming through the great stained-glass window, falling on his face. Jewel-bright greens and reds, harlequining his expression into something monstrous. As if the day wasn't surreal enough to start with.

Here in the kitchen, Mum is busy tidying things. The bags are all unpacked, the cake has come out of the oven and is sitting on the wire cooling rack, and every now and then Mum stops to smooth her clothes down, almost as if she's expecting guests.

Except it's not guests she is expecting, Lucia thinks. At least not the kind that come to eat cake.

'Lucia,' Mum says. 'Look after Bear. She wants some attention.'

Lucia stares numbly at her mother. She wants to respond, but nothing comes out of her mouth. It's like being shot through with anaesthetic; her face, all her muscles are immobile. What is in the garden is just like it was before. Exactly the same and there is no escaping it. She knows what the scene is *meant* to look like - and she can guess who has done it - but now it's upon her it all feels so unexpected and wrong.

'Lucia? Did you hear me?'