

WATCHING
YOU

PROLOGUE



MARCH 24

DC Rose Pelham kneels down; she can see something behind the kitchen door, just in front of the bin. For a minute she thinks it's a bloodstained twist of tissue, maybe, or an old bandage. Then she thinks perhaps it is a dead flower. But as she looks at it more closely she can see that it's a tassel. A red suede tassel. The sort that might once have been attached to a handbag, or to a boot.

It sits just on top of a small puddle of blood, strongly suggesting that it had fallen there in the aftermath of the murder. She photographs it in situ from many angles and then, with her gloved fingers, she plucks the tassel from the floor and drops it into an evidence bag, which she seals.

She stands up and turns to survey the scene of the crime: a scruffy kitchen, old-fashioned pine units, a green Aga piled with pots and pans, a large wooden table piled with table mats and exercise books and newspapers and folded washing, a small extension to the rear with a cheap timber glazed roof, double doors to the garden, a study area with a laptop, a printer, a shredder, a table lamp.

It's an innocuous room, bland even. A kitchen like a million other kitchens all across the country. A kitchen for drinking coffee in, for doing homework and eating breakfast and reading newspapers in. Not a kitchen for dark secrets or crimes of passion. Not a kitchen for murdering someone in.

But there, on the floor, is a body, splayed facedown inside a large, vaguely kidney-shaped pool of blood. The knife that had been used is in the kitchen sink, thoroughly washed down with a soapy sponge. The attack on the victim had been frenzied: at least twenty knife wounds to the neck, back, and shoulders. But little in the way of

blood has spread to other areas of the kitchen—no handprints, no smear, no spatters—leading Rose to the conclusion that the attack had been unexpected, fast, and efficient and that the victim had had little chance to put up a fight.

Rose takes a marker pen from her jacket pocket and writes on the bag containing the red suede tassel.

Description: “Red suede/suedette tassel.”

Location: “In front of fridge, just inside door from hallway.”

Date and time of collection: “Friday, March 24, 2017, 11:48 p.m.”

It’s probably nothing, she muses, just a thing fallen from a fancy handbag. But nothing was often everything in forensics.

Nothing could often be the answer to the whole bloody thing.

PART ONE



JANUARY 2

Joey Mullen laid the flowers against the gravestone and ran her fingertip across the words engraved into the pink-veined granite.

SARAH JANE MULLEN
1962–2016
Beloved mother of Jack and Josephine

“Happy new year, Mum,” she said. “I’m sorry I didn’t come to see you yesterday. Alfie and I had shocking hangovers. We went to a party over in Frenchay, at Candy’s new flat. Remember Candy? Candy Boyd? She was in my year at school; she had all that long blonde hair that she could sit on? You really liked her because she always said hello to you if she passed you on the street? Anyway, she’s doing really well; she’s a physiotherapist. Or . . . a *chiropractor*? Anyway, something like that. She cried when I told her you were dead. Everyone cries when I tell them. Everyone loved you so much, Mum. Everyone wished you were their mum. I was so lucky to have a mum like you. I wish I hadn’t stayed away for so long now. If I’d known what was going to happen, I would never have gone away at all. And I’m sorry you never got to meet Alfie. He’s adorable. He works at a wine bar in town right now, but he wants to be a painter-decorator. He’s at his mum’s now, actually, painting her kitchen. Or at least, he’s supposed to be! She’s probably made him sit down and watch TV with her, knowing her. And him. He’s a bit of a procrastinator. Takes him a while to get going. But you’d love him, Mum. He’s the cutest, sweetest, nicest guy and he’s so in love with me and he treats me so well and I know how much of a worry I was to you when I was younger. I know what I put

you through and I'm so, so sorry. But I wish you could see me now. I'm growing up, Mum. I'm finally growing up!"

She sighed.

"Anyway, I'd better go now. It'll be getting dark soon and then I'll get really scared. I love you, Mum. I miss you. I wish you weren't dead. I wish I could go to your house and have a cup of tea with you, have a good gossip, have a bitch about Jack and Rebecca. I could tell you about the gold taps. Or maybe I could tell you about the gold taps now? No, I'll tell you about the gold taps next time. Give you something to look forward to.

"Sleep tight, Mum. I love you."



Joey climbed the steep lane from Lower Melville to the parade of houses above. Even in the sodium gloom of a January afternoon, the houses of Melville Heights popped like a row of children's building blocks: red, yellow, turquoise, purple, lime, sage, fuchsia, red again. They sat atop a terraced embankment looking down on the small streets of Lower Melville like guests at a private party that no one else was invited to.

Iconic was the word that people used to describe this row of twenty-seven Victorian villas: *the iconic painted houses of Melville Heights*. Joey had seen them from a distance for most of her life. They were the sign that they were less than twenty minutes from home on long car journeys of her childhood. They followed her to work; they guided her home again. She'd been to a party once, in the pink house, when she was a student. Split crudely into flats and bedsits, smelling of damp and cooked mince, it hadn't felt bright pink on the inside. But the views from up there were breathtaking: the River Avon pausing to arc picturesquely on its mile-long journey to the city, the patchwork fields beyond, the bulge of the landscape on the horizon into a plump hill crowned with trees that blossomed every spring into puffballs of hopeful green.

She'd dreamed of living up here as a child, oscillated between which house would be hers: the lilac or the pink. And as she grew older, the sky blue or the sage. And now, at twenty-six, she found herself living in the cobalt-blue house. Number 14. Not a sign of a

lifetime of hard work and rich rewards, but a fringe benefit of her older brother's lifetime of hard work and rich rewards.

Jack was ten years older than Joey and a consultant heart surgeon at Bristol General Hospital, one of the youngest in the county's history. Two years ago he'd married a woman called Rebecca. Rebecca was nice, but brittle and rather humorless. Joey had always thought her lovely brother would end up with a fun-loving, no-nonsense nurse or maybe a jolly children's doctor. But for some reason he'd chosen a strait-laced systems analyst from Staffordshire.

They'd bought their cobalt house ten months ago, when Joey was still farting about in the Balearics hosting foam parties. She hadn't even realized it was one of the painted houses until Jack had taken her to see it when she moved back to Bristol three months ago.

"You bought a painted house," she'd said, her hand against her heart. "You bought a painted house and you didn't tell me."

"You didn't ask," he'd responded. "And anyway, it wasn't my idea. It was Rebecca's. She virtually bribed the old lady who was living here to sell up. Said it was literally the only house in Bristol she wanted to live in."

"It's beautiful," she'd said, her eyes roaming over the tasteful interior of taupe and teal and copper and gray. "The most beautiful house I've ever seen."

"I'm glad you like it," Jack had said, "because Rebecca and I were wondering if you two would like to live here for a while. Just until you get yourselves sorted out."

"Oh my God," she'd said, her hands at her mouth. "Are you serious? Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure," he'd replied, taking her by the hand. "Come and see the attic room. It's completely self-contained—perfect for a pair of *newlyweds*." He'd nudged her and grinned at her.

Joey had grinned back. No one was more surprised than she was that she had come back from Ibiza with a husband.

His name was Alfie Butter and he was very good-looking. Far too good-looking for her. Or at least, so she'd thought in the aqua haze of Ibizan nights. In the gunmetal gloom of a Bristol winter the blue, blue eyes were just blue, the Titian hair was just red, the golden tan was just sun-damage. Alfie was just a regular guy.

They'd married barefoot on the beach. Joey had worn a pink chiffon slip dress and carried a posy of pink and peridot lantanas. Alfie had worn a white T-shirt and pink shorts, and white bougainvillea blossom in his hair. Their marriage had been witnessed by the managers of the hotel where they both worked. Afterward they'd had dinner on a terrace with a few friends, taken a few pills, danced until the sun came up, spent the next day in bed, and then and only then did they phone their families to tell them what they'd done.

She would have had a proper wedding if her mother had still been alive. But she was dead and Joey's dad was not really a wedding kind of a man, nor a flying-out-to-Ibiza kind of a man, and Joey's parents had themselves married secretly at Gretna Green when her mum was four months pregnant with Jack.

"Ah, well," he'd said, with a note of relief. "I suppose it's a family tradition."



"Hi," she called out in the hallway, testing for the presence of her sister-in-law. Rebecca made a lot of noise about how delighted she was to be housing a pair of twenty-something lovebirds in her immaculate, brand-new guest suite—"It's just so brilliant that we had the space for you! Really, it's just brilliant having you here. Totally brilliant"—but her demeanor told a different story. She hid from them. All the time. In fact, she was hiding from Joey right now, pretending to be arranging things in their huge walk-in pantry.

"Oh, hi!" she said, turning disingenuously at Joey's greeting, a jar of horseradish in her hand. "I didn't hear you come in!"

Joey smiled brightly. She'd totally heard her coming in. There was a mug of freshly made tea still steaming on the kitchen table, a newspaper half read, a half-eaten packet of supermarket sushi. Joey pictured Rebecca Mullen twitching at the sound of Joey's key in the lock, looking for her escape, scurrying into the pantry, and randomly picking up a jar of horseradish.

"Sorry, I did shout out hello."

"It's fine. It's fine. I'm just . . ." She waved the jar of horseradish in a vague arc around the pantry.

“Nest-building?”

“Yes!” said Rebecca. “Yes. I am. Nest-building. Exactly.”

Both their eyes fell to Rebecca’s rounded stomach. Her first baby was due in four months. It was a girl baby who would, on or around May 1, become Joey’s niece. One of the reasons, Joey imagined, that Rebecca had agreed to let her and Alfie have their guest suite was that Joey was a trained nursery nurse. Not that she’d touched a baby since she was eighteen. But still, she had all the skills. She could, in theory, change a nappy in forty-eight seconds flat.



There was a stained-glass window halfway up the oak staircase that ran up the front of the house. Joey often stopped here to press her nose to the clear parts of the design, enjoying being able to see out with anyone seeing in. It was early afternoon, almost dusk at this time of the year; the trees on the hills on the other side of the river were bare and slightly awkward.

She watched a shiny black car turn from the main road in the village below and begin its ascent up the escarpment toward the terrace. The only cars that came up here were those of residents and visitors. She waited for a while longer to see who it might be. The car parked on the other side of the street and she watched a woman get out of the passenger side, a boyish, thirty-something woman with jaw-length, light brown hair wearing a hoodie and jeans. She stood by the back door while a young boy climbed out, about fourteen years old, the spitting image of her. Then a rather handsome older man got out of the driver’s side, tall and leggy in a crumpled sky-blue polo shirt and dark jeans, short dark hair, white at the temples. He went to the boot of the car and pulled out two medium-sized suitcases, with a certain appealing effortlessness. He handed one to his son, passed a pile of coats and a carrier bag to his wife, and then they crossed the road and let themselves into the yellow house.

Joey carried on up the stairs, the image of the attractive older man returning from his family Christmas break already fading from her consciousness.

PART 1 OF RECORDED INTERVIEW

Date: 03/25/2017

Location: Trinity Road Police Station, Bristol BS2 0NW

Conducted by: Officers from Somerset & Avon Police

POLICE: This interview is being tape-recorded. I am Detective Inspector Rose Pelham and I'm based at Trinity Road Police Station. I work with the serious crime team. Could you please give us your full name?

JM: Josephine Louise Mullen.

POLICE: And your address?

JM: 14 Melville Heights, Bristol BS12 2GG.

POLICE: Thank you. And can you tell us about your relationship with Tom Fitzwilliam?

JM: He lives two doors down. He gave me a lift into work sometimes. We chatted if we bumped into each other on the street. He knew my brother and my sister-in-law.

POLICE: Thank you. And could you now tell us where you were last night between approximately 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.

JM: I was at the Bristol Harbour Hotel.

POLICE: And were you there alone?

JM: Mostly.

POLICE: Mostly? Who else was there with you?

JM: [Silence.]

POLICE: Ms. Mullen? Please could you tell us who else was there?

At the Bristol Harbour Hotel?

JM: But he was only there for a few minutes.
Nothing happened. It was just . . .

POLICE: Ms. Mullen. The name of this person.
Please.

JM: It was . . . it was Tom Fitzwilliam.



JANUARY 6

Joey saw Tom Fitzwilliam again a few days later. This time it was in the village. He was coming out of the bookshop, wearing a suit and talking to someone on the phone. He said good-bye to the person on the phone, pressed his finger to the screen to end the call, and slid the phone into his jacket pocket. She saw his face as he turned left out of the shop. It held the residue of a smile. His upturned mouth made a different shape of his face. It turned up more on one side than the other. An eyebrow followed suit. A hand went to his silver-tipped hair as the wind blew it asunder. The smile turned to a grimace and made another shape of his face again. His jaw hardened. His forehead bunched. A slow blink of his eyes. And then he was walking toward his black car parked across the street, a *blip blip* of the locking system, a flash of lights, long legs folded away into the driver's side. Gone.

But a shadow of him lingered on in her consciousness.



Alfie had been a crush. For months she'd watched him around the resort, made up stories about him based on tiny scraps of information she'd collected from people who'd interacted with him. No one knew where he was from. Someone thought he might have been a writer. Someone else said he was a vet. He'd had long hair then, dark red, tied back in a ponytail or sometimes a man-bun. He had a small red beard and a big fit body, a tattoo of a climbing rose all the way up his trunk, another of a pair of wings across his shoulders. He often had a guitar hanging from a strap around his chest. He rarely wore a

top when he wasn't working. He had a smile for everyone, a swagger and a cheek.

In Joey's imagination, Alfie Butter was kind of otherworldly; she ascribed to him a sort of supernatural persona, and tried to imagine what they would talk about if their paths were ever to cross. Then one day he'd stopped her at the back of the resort next to the laundry and his blue, blue eyes had locked on to hers and he'd smiled and said, "Joey, right?"

She'd said yes, she was Joey.

"Someone tells me you're a Bristol girl. Is that right?"

Yes, she'd said, yes, that was right.

"Whereabouts?"

"Frenchay?"

He'd punched the air. "I knew it!" he'd said. "I just knew it! You know when you get that feeling in your gut, and someone said you were from Bristol and I just thought *Frenchay girl*. Got to be. And I was right! I'm a Frenchay boy!"

Wow, she'd said, wow. It was a small, small world, she'd told him. Which school did you go to?

And Alfie had turned out to be neither supernatural nor otherworldly, a vet nor a poet, nor even very good at playing the guitar, but spectacularly good in bed and a very good hugger. He'd had her name tattooed on his ankle two weeks after their first encounter. He said he'd never felt like this about anyone, in his life, ever. He slung his heavy arm across her shoulder whenever they walked together. He pulled her on to his lap whenever she walked past him. He said he'd follow her to the ends of the earth. Then, when her mother died and she said she wanted to come home, he said he'd follow her back to Bristol. He'd proposed to her after she returned from her mother's funeral. They'd married two weeks after that.

But what do you do with an unattainable crush once it's yours to keep? What does it become? Should there perhaps be a word to describe it? Because that's the thing with getting what you want: all that yearning and dreaming and fantasizing leaves a great big hole that can only be filled with more yearning and dreaming and fantasizing. And maybe that's what lay at the root of Joey's sudden and

unexpected obsession with Tom Fitzwilliam. Maybe he arrived at the precise moment that the hole in Joey's interior fantasy life needed filling.

And if it hadn't been him, maybe it would have been someone else instead.

JANUARY 23

Tom Fitzwilliam was fifty-one and he was, according to Jack, a *lovely, lovely man*.

Not that Joey had asked her brother for his opinion of their neighbor—it had been offered, spontaneously, apropos of an article in the local newspaper about an award that the local school had just won.

“Oh, look,” he said, the paper spread open in front of him on the kitchen table. “That’s our neighbor, lives two doors down.” He tapped a photo with his forefinger. “Tom Fitzwilliam. Lovely, lovely man.”

Joey peered over Jack’s shoulder, a half-washed saucepan in one hand, a washing-up sponge in the other. “Oh,” she said, “I’ve seen him, I think. Black car?”

“Yes, that’s right. He’s the headmaster of our local state school. A ‘superhead.’” He made quotes in the air with his fingers. “Brought in after a bad Ofsted. His school just won something and now everyone loves him.”

“That’s nice,” said Joey. “Do you know him, then?”

“Yeah. Kind of. He and his wife were very helpful when we were having the building works done. They used to send us texts during the day to let us know what was happening and calmed down some other not-so-nice neighbors who were getting their knickers in a knot about dust and noise. Nice people.”

Joey shrugged. Jack thought everyone was nice.

“So.” He closed the paper and folded it in half. “How did the interview go?”

Joey slung the tea towel over the side of the sink. “It was OK.”

She’d applied for a job at the Melville, the famous boutique hotel

and bar in the village: front-of-house manager. The pleasant woman interviewing her could tell the moment she walked in that she was not fit for the purpose and Joey had made no effort to convince her otherwise.

“Glorified receptionist,” she said now. “Plus four night shifts a week. *No thank you.*”

She didn’t look at Jack, didn’t want to witness his reaction to yet more evidence that his little sister was a total loser. She had quite wanted the job; the hotel was beautiful, the owner was nice, and the pay was good. The problem was that she couldn’t actually see herself in the job. The problem was . . . well, the problem was her. She was nearly twenty-seven. In three years’ time she would be thirty. She was a married woman. But yet, for some reason, she still felt like a child.

“Fair enough,” he said, turning the pages of the newspaper mechanically. “I’m sure something will come up, eventually.”

“Bound to,” she said, her heart not reaching her words.

Then, “Jack, are you OK about me and Alfie being here? Like, really?”

She watched her brother roll his eyes good-naturedly. “Joey. For God’s sake. How many times do I have to tell you? I love having you here. And Alfie too. It’s a pleasure.”

“What about Rebecca, though? Are you sure she’s not regretting it?”

“She’s fine, Joey. We’re both fine. It’s all good.”

“Do you promise?”

“Yes, Joey. I promise.”



Joey got a job three days later. It was a terrible, terrible job, but it was a job. She was now a party coordinator at a notoriously rough soft play center in the city center called Whackadoo. The uniform was an acid-yellow polo shirt with red pull-on trousers. The pay was reasonable and the hours were fine. The manager was a big, butch woman with a crew cut called Dawn to whom Joey had taken an instant liking. It could all have been worse, of course it could. Anything could always be worse. But not much.

All employees of Whackadoo were required to spend their first

week on the floor. “Nobody gets to sit in an office here until they’ve cleaned the toilets halfway through a party for thirty eight-year-old boys,” Dawn had said, a grim twinkle in her eye.

“Can’t be any worse than cleaning vomit, Coke, and Jägerbombs off the bar after a fourteen-hour stag party,” Joey had replied.

“Probably not,” Dawn had conceded. “Probably not. Can you start tomorrow?”



Joey stopped in the village on her way home from the interview and ordered herself a large gin and tonic in the cozy bar of the Melville Hotel. It was early for gin and tonic. The man sitting two tables away was still having breakfast. She told herself it was celebratory but in reality, she needed something to blunt the edges of her terror and self-loathing.

Whackadoo.

Windowless cavern of unthinkable noise and bad smells. Breeze-block hellhole of spilt drinks and tantrums, where a child shat in the ball pond at least once a day apparently. She shuddered and knocked back another glug of gin. The man eating his breakfast looked at her curiously. She blinked at him imperiously.

You could see the painted houses from down here, a bolt of running color across the tops of the narrow Georgian windows. There was the cobalt blue of Jack and Rebecca’s house, the canary yellow of Tom Fitzwilliam’s. It was another world up there. *Rarefied*. And she, a half-formed woman working in a soft play center: what on earth was she doing up there?

She looked down at her bitten nails, her scuffed boots, her old chinos. She thought about the aged pants she was wearing, the decrepit bra. She knew she was two months past a timely trip to the hairdresser. She was drinking gin alone in a hotel bar on a Thursday at not even midday. And then she thought of herself only five months ago, tanned and lean, clutching her bouquet, the talcum sand between her toes, the sun shining down from a vivid blue sky, standing at Alfie’s side; young, beautiful, in paradise, in love. “You are the loveliest thing I have ever seen,” her boss had said, wiping a tear from her own cheek. “So young, so perfect, so pure.”

She switched on her phone and scrolled through her gallery until she got to the wedding photos. For a few minutes she wallowed in the memories of the happiest day of her life, until she heard the bar door open and looked up.

It was him.

Tom Fitzwilliam.

The head teacher.

He pulled off his suit jacket and draped it across the back of a chair, resting a leather shoulder bag on the seat. Then, slowly, in a way that suggested either self-consciousness or a complete lack of self-consciousness, he sauntered to the bar. The barman appeared to know him. He made him a lime and soda, and told him he'd bring his food to the table when it was ready.

Joey watched him walking back to his table. He wore a blue shirt with a subtle check. The bottom buttons, she noticed, strained very gently against a slight softness and Joey felt a strange wave of pleasure, a sense of excitement about the unapologetic contours of his body, the suggestion of meals enjoyed and worries forgotten about over a bottle of decent wine. She found herself wanting to slide her fingers between those tensed buttons, to touch, just for a moment, the soft flesh beneath.

The thought shocked her, left her slightly winded. She turned her attention to her gin and tonic, aware that her glass was virtually empty, aware that it was time for her to leave. But she didn't want to move. She couldn't move. She was suddenly stultified by a terrible and unexpected longing. She turned slightly to catch a glimpse of his feet, his ankles, the rumpled cowl of gray cotton sock, the worn hide of black leather lace-up shoes, an inch of pale, bare flesh just there, between the sock and the hem of his trousers, which she'd been aware of him slowly tugging up before sitting down.

She was in the hard grip of a shocking physical attraction. She turned her eyes away from his feet and back to her empty glass and then to her wedding photos on her phone, which had only 2 percent charge left and was about to die. But she couldn't, she simply couldn't sit here staring into an empty gin glass. Not now. Not in front of this man.

She was aware of him taking papers out of his shoulder bag, shuffling them around, pulling a pen from somewhere, holding it airily away from him in one hand, clicking and unclicking, clicking and unclicking, bringing it down to make a mark on the paper, putting it away from him again. *Click, click*. One foot bouncing slightly against the fulcrum of the other. She would leave when the waiter came with his food. That was what she'd do. When he was distracted.

The screen of her phone turned black, finally giving up its ghost. She slipped it into her handbag and stared at the floor until finally the barman disappeared at the sound of a buzzer somewhere behind him and reappeared a moment later with some kind of sandwich on a wooden board arranged alongside a glossy hillock of herbs and curly leaves. She saw Tom move paperwork out of the way, smiling generously at the barman.

"Thank you," she heard him say as she picked up her jacket and squeezed her way between her chair and the table, almost knocking it over in her keenness to leave without being noticed. "That looks lovely," he was saying as she crossed the bar, her heavy boots making a loud knocking sound against the dove-gray floor tiles, the strap of her shoulder bag refusing to sit properly against her shoulder, her trailing jacket knocking over a small display of leaflets about the village farmers' market as she passed.

The barman called over, "Don't worry. I'll pick them up."

"Thank you," she said, turning guiltily at his address. She wrenched open the door and threw herself out onto the street, but not before, for just one flickering second, her eyes had met his and something terrible had passed between them, something that she could only describe as a mutual fascination.