

There was no sign of the other sandal.

The position of the body, face down in the dirt, made it impossible for Dee Doran to see her face. She didn't need to. She'd recognised the woman immediately. Katie Hope, her neighbour and friend, and single mother to two-year-old Jake.

She couldn't tell how long Katie had been lying here. A combination of heat and hangover meant Dee hadn't left her house all morning. She tried to remember if she'd heard a car, but her sitting room was at the back of the house, facing the beach. And she'd been listening to music. Leonard Cohen's final album blasting through her speakers, blocking out whatever had been happening out there.

Three words skittered around her head. Hit and run. Someone had driven into Katie, mowed her down and left her to die. Here on this empty stretch of shingle coast on the outskirts of Eastbourne, where days passed

without Dee ever seeing a car or another human being.

Her stomach contracted, and she swung away from the body as a stream of puke shot up her throat and out of her mouth. Memories of the dead woman fast-forwarded through her head. Katie heavily pregnant in the weeks leading up to the birth of her son. Pushing the buggy along the bumpy track in winter, the baby bundled up so that all Dee could see of him was a pair of pale brown eyes and a cold-reddened nose. Katie's smile, pure and perfect, when Dee said what a beautiful baby he was.

What's his name? she had asked, not interested but not knowing what else to say. Jake, Katie had told her. His name is Jake.

Dee spat the last bit of vomit out, wiped her mouth with the back of her hand and stood up. She'd tried so hard not to get close to them. Cocooned in her own bubble of self-pity and grief, she hadn't wanted to let anyone into her

life. In the end, keeping her distance hadn't been an option. It was obvious to anyone with a pair of eyes that Katie was lonely. And Dee had always been a sucker for a lost soul.

Her chest ached thinking of Jake. Wondering where he was right now, and who would have the terrible task of telling him his mummy wouldn't be coming to collect him.

That was when she saw the buggy. A few feet further along the road, folded in on itself. Its metal frame twisted into awkward angles, reminding her of the dead woman. Two wheels missing. She could see one of them in the ditch. Beside the buggy was a shopping bag, which Dee guessed had been hanging on the handles of the buggy. Its contents were scattered across the path. A bunch of burst bananas; a carton of milk, split open, its contents soaked into the dusty surface of the road; a book, lying open, face down, the title in blue writing across the cover – *What Every*

Parent Needs to Know.

At the side of the road, something white, blinding under the cloudless blue sky. One of those parasols you attach onto a buggy to protect your child from the sun. Except the buggy was empty.

Dee ran to the beach, slipping and skidding over the shingle, eyes scanning every inch of stone and sea and sky, her heart pounding so loud and fast it drowned out the sound of the waves rolling over the stones. Nothing. Midweek, not many people came out here, so far away from shops and other amenities.

He was only two years old. He never went anywhere on his own. Either Dee or Katie was always with him. Over the last two months, Dee had taken him swimming two or three times a week. The thought that he might have gone into the sea alone, without an adult to stop him falling face first into the waves, was unbearable.

She clambered back up the stones to the road, thinking she must have missed him. But like the beach, there was no one here. She held her breath, believing in some deep part of her that if she stayed completely still and silent, she would be able to hear him. She imagined him hiding behind the wall of her house, crouched down out of sight, too scared to come out.

But nothing moved, and when she finally released her breath and checked behind the wall, he wasn't there either. She walked back to Katie, calling Jake's name over and over.

But there was no child. Jake was gone.

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Heat rose in waves from the dusty road, blurring the body and the white-coated men and women milling around it. Dee sat sideways in the back of a navy-blue car. Feet and legs