

LBRIS

We know
books

MY
HUSBAND'S
WIFE



ALICE FEENEY

MACMILLAN

1

EDEN

30th October

Everybody lies and everybody dies. Those are two of the only things you can be certain of in an uncertain world. The half dark is my happy place. That thin sliver of time that separates night from day, and day from night. Twilight. Sunset. Nightfall. If we give things a different name, it's easier to pretend they aren't the same. Like love and heartbreak. No joy lasts forever. No sorrow lasts forever either, and time is too precious to be wasted. So, even though it is getting late, and the sky is already dressing itself for dusk, I head out into the night and I run.

The cool evening air slaps my face and stings my skin and I see clouds of my own breath in front of me, but I like the cold almost as much as I like the dark. The smell of the sea floods my senses, and I can hear relentless waves crashing in the distance, getting louder as I run closer. The next sixty minutes are mine. For the next hour I am not just the wife, or a mother, or a woman trying to find her way in an increasingly lost world. For the next hour I am just me. I leave my worries behind, along with my phone, knowing that my problems will all still be waiting for me when I get home.

I jog down the hill towards the village, my long blonde ponytail swinging from side to side as my trainers pound the pavement. I live

for these moments of feeling young and free again. Thirtysomething isn't old, but the milestone of a big birthday motivated me to make a few changes. Running was just one of them. I'm so grateful for everything that I have – my husband, our home, my health, our freedom – but sometimes I can't help wondering how things might have turned out if I had made different choices when I was younger. Life is filled with sliding doors and dead ends, and I'm sure everyone wonders *what if* from time to time. I run a little faster, as though I can escape the thoughts if I put enough distance between me and them. I'm good at running away from the world when real life gets too loud.

The picturesque fishing village that recently became our home is small and quaint and quiet. Hope Falls is bordered by the Cornish coast on one side and wild moors on the other. Stepping into the village feels like stepping back in time, and I like living somewhere with so much history. Modern places rarely have a good story to tell, a bit like modern people. A network of narrow lanes and cobbled streets tightly packed with tiny, terraced houses and quirky independent shops lead downhill to the seafront. Almost all the shops are closed, as are the cafés and restaurants at this time of year when the tourists retreat to the cities they came from. Former fishermen's cottages painted in pretty pastel shades line the harbour, but most of them are now holiday homes so sit empty in winter. The ghost-town vibe might bother some people, but I like the peace and quiet. I find it calming.

I keep running, only slowing down when I reach the art gallery, but I still don't stop.

Not even when I see my name on a poster in the window.

EDEN FOX

Local artist exhibition

8 PM tonight

LBDIS

We know

blocks

My first exhibition still feels like a dream come true.

A dream that I've had for so long. Too long.

That's what happens when you live someone else's dreams instead of your own.

I got married young. For years, being a wife and a mother seemed to take up all my time, but I finally have some spare to do something for me again now that our daughter no longer lives with us. Once I got over the initial guilt of putting myself first for a change, it felt good to rehabilitate my ambition, and painting is my one true passion. Dreams deflate as we get older. Sometimes they disappear completely, real life sucks all the air out of them, but I'm trying to resuscitate mine. Tonight will be the first time I've shown my work, and it's the first time my husband and I will meet our new neighbours. People who I hope might become friends, because I don't have too many of those. Remembering why hurts, so I concentrate on my breathing, find my rhythm and run away from my worries.

They soon catch up with me again.

My husband hasn't been himself since our daughter moved out and we moved here. I can't decide whether it's just empty-nest syndrome or something more. Moving out of the city was my idea, but moving to Cornwall was his, despite his job in London. Harrison kept our old flat in the city and sometimes stays there instead of coming home to me. I don't mind; his work is important. I do mind that he secretly sees our daughter without me and thinks I don't know, but the two of them always had a closer bond. Even though I'm the one who gave up their life to care for her and raise her because he was too busy.

It's almost completely dark when I reach the scenic harbour where I am greeted by panoramic views of the ocean. The tall, black granite harbour walls have protected this village for over two hundred years, and will no doubt still be standing long after I am gone. Sturdy. Strong. Safe. These walls are all the things I am not but wish to be,

and I touch the stone for good luck even though I know there's no such thing. Lines of bobbing fishing boats decorate the waterfront, their different colours now shaded by shadows, and the night air is still and cool and quiet. By the time I turn onto the coast path, the last of the light has been swallowed by the horizon and the only thing lighting the sea now is the reflection of a full moon: a shimmering silver path dancing on blackened waves. There is an infinite black blanket of sky covered in star-shaped sequins, a whole universe of endless possibility and wonder, and it reminds me how small and insignificant we and our sometimes seemingly insurmountable problems are.

I am painfully shy. The thought of meeting so many strangers at the gallery tonight, knowing that they'll all be silently judging *me*, not just my work, fills me with fear. Some people love a good party; personally, I prefer a good book. I spent years alone at home taking care of our daughter. Things might have been different if she was *normal*, but she needed me twenty-four seven, and as a result I am out of practice when it comes to social situations. I rarely leave the house at all these days, except to run. Harrison is the opposite. He has always known how to charm strangers and make them fall in love with him. Just like he did with me. I have never been a people person. I have spent a lifetime feeling as though I don't fit and don't belong, but I hope things might be different now that we have moved here.

A brand-new start for a brand-new me.

I run with the sea-salt wind in my face and the soothing sound of the ocean in my ears and propel myself along the steepest part of the coast path to the top of the hill, where there is a waterfall crashing and cascading down the cliff. Harrison and I shared a romantic picnic here recently to watch the sunset. He called it *our special place*, but the scenic spot that gave Hope Falls its name is also the place where many people give up hope. The carefully positioned suicide hotline poster always dampens my mood. I guess sometimes hope fails. I continue on my circular route for a mile or so, then turn off

the coast path, heading further inland and onto the moor. I run to get away from it all but always end up back where I started. The irony is not lost on me.

Our house is just outside the village, all on its own at the top of a steep hill, literally built into the cliffs overlooking Hope Falls. It was called Spyglass when we bought it and the name suits the quirky building with its huge windows that look like eyes. The house has white, wonky, wavelike walls, and knowing it is our forever home makes me so happy. It's an emotion I haven't worn for a while and I'm relieved it still fits. Hopefully the vintage black velvet dress I have chosen to wear later will still fit too.

Spyglass was built in the sixteenth century; it was previously owned by a woman who had lived there for almost one hundred years. It looked more like a museum than a home when we first stepped inside, couldn't have been more different from our modern flat in London, and I could tell Harrison wasn't sure. The potential cost almost blinded him from the potential, but when I fall in love with something I have to have it. Renovating is more my bag than his – my husband doesn't have the patience – but sometimes even the simplest of makeovers can transform a place – or a person – making them almost unrecognizable.

When I reach the front gate I see that Harrison's midlife-crisis car is in the driveway. I'm so happy that he is home from London on time for the exhibition that I run down the garden path, excited to see him. We've had more than our fair share of hard times and heart-break over the years, but all of that is behind us now. Hope Falls is a fresh start for our marriage, not just for me, and I'm hoping he'll be proud of me tonight. Maybe look at me the way he used to, when we were still just us. Who I used to be is always doing battle with who I want to be.

The only thing I take with me when I run is my key to the front door.

When I go to slot it in the lock it doesn't seem to fit, so I try again.

It still won't go in and I don't understand.

It's as though it's the wrong key, or the wrong house, which isn't possible. This is the only property on this quiet country lane overlooking the village.

I stare at the key, then at the door. The key is on a key chain Harrison gave me the day we got the house. We shared a bottle of champagne in our special place by the waterfall, watching the sun set and the moon rise, and he handed me a beautiful gift box. Inside was the key to the house attached to a silver key chain with my name – Eden – surrounded by stars on the front, and the words *Love you to the moon and back* on the other side.

I try to open the door again and when the key still doesn't work, I tap the fox-shaped knocker three times. There must be some simple explanation. Harri will probably take the key from my hand and slot it straight in the lock and make me feel like a fool. The thought makes me smile again, but the smile is soon replaced with a frown.

My husband doesn't open the door.

A woman does.

I've never seen her before but there is something familiar about her.

She looks a lot like me.

"Can I help you?" she asks, and I'm shocked by how much she sounds like me too.

At first, I don't speak. It feels like I can't. Instead, I just stand and stare.

She's wearing my black velvet dress, the one I was going to put on tonight.

"Who are you?" I ask, but my voice comes out as a whisper.

"I'm Eden Fox. I live here."

2

EDEN

“*m* Eden Fox. What are you talking about?”

The woman stares at the key I am still holding as though I am brandishing a weapon. She looks down on me in every way, making me feel oddly self-conscious about my running clothes, when she is wearing *my* dress and standing in *my* home. Then she looks at me as if she thinks I am crazy or dangerous or both.

For a moment I wonder if I am.

But I *am* Eden Fox and this *is* my house.

We might have only moved in a few weeks ago, but I’ve barely left Spyglass since then. The previous owner lived here for almost one hundred years. To say that the house was in a state of disrepair would be putting it politely, but things that get broken can often be fixed with a little love and hard work. Despite my husband’s impressive salary as the CEO of a company in London, there still wasn’t much spare cash after the move, so I did a lot of the work myself. I haven’t forgotten ripping up carpets, sanding floors or painting the walls all on my own while Harrison was still in the city. I put my blood, sweat and soul into the place.

This house is mine.

“I think you’ve made a mistake,” says the woman claiming it’s hers and that *she* is *me*.

She does look a bit like me.

She’s wearing my clothes.

She even smells of my perfume.

The woman starts to close the door, and I feel off-kilter and strange, like when you know you’re having a bad dream and try to wake yourself up. But this isn’t a dream and I don’t understand what is happening.

I put my foot in the entrance, preventing her from closing the door, and she stares down at my running shoes. Her mouth forms a perfect O. She looks so shocked I almost apologize.

“I don’t know who you are, but this is *my* house,” I insist.

“You’re clearly confused. I moved here a few weeks ago,” she says, sounding afraid.

But she’s lying.

She didn’t move here a few weeks ago, *I* did.

A million thoughts race through my mind, but none of them make sense.

I worry that this is some kind of elaborate identity theft, but there is very little of any value inside. Harrison has a well-paid job, but with the mortgage and our daughter’s fees to pay, we are not cash rich. There is no logical reason for anyone to want to steal my name or my life or my things. We’re just normal people, living in a normal house, leading normal lives. I wish I hadn’t left my phone behind on the kitchen counter. At least then I’d be able to call someone, though I’m not sure who. I study the woman’s face, unnerved by how similar we look. Her long blonde hair is even styled the same way as mine, her skin is painted with the same minimal makeup and I know that’s my dress. It was from a tiny little boutique in London and I’ve had it for years, fixed it myself when it got torn at a party. I tend to make do and mend everything about my life.

She really does look like me. A slightly older, more polished version

of me. Like the me I could have been if I cared more about what I looked like. If I'd been able to spend the last ten years only looking after myself instead of my family.

The woman is clutching the front door and I see something else I recognize on her hand.

She's wearing my engagement and wedding rings.

I always take them off when I run. Never wanting to attract attention to myself when out running alone at night. Stripping myself of anything valuable when I am vulnerable, because of a deep-rooted fear of having the things I love, things I worked so hard to get and to keep, taken from me.

I stare at my ring. My dress. My home. Her face.

Confusion transforms into rage, and my fear twists into fury.

"What the fuck is going on?" I blurt out.

She tries to close the door again. "I've asked you to leave my property."

"It isn't *your* property, you crazy bitch," I say, raising my voice. She suddenly looks terrified and stares over my shoulder as though there might be someone standing behind me in the darkness. I look too, there isn't, but when I turn to check I see Harrison's car in the driveway again. "Where is my husband?"

"I don't know who you are, or who your husband is," she says, regaining her composure. "But if you don't leave right now, I will call the police."

"Good. Go ahead and call them," I tell her. "If I had my phone I'd call them myself."

And then I hear his voice and it is such a relief.

"Is everything okay?" Harrison says, hurrying down the hallway behind her and staring in my direction. He's still dressed in his suit from the office – the black Armani accompanied by a black shirt and tie. Despite being ten years older than me, his well-groomed appearance and immaculate dress sense often make him seem younger than his years. Some men get more handsome with age and my husband

is one of them. He's my rock. My lover. My best friend. Whatever this is will be okay now that he is here.

She answers before I can.

"This *woman* thinks she lives here," she tells him. "She's making all kinds of threats and won't take her foot out of the door."

I expect him to demand to know who the hell *she* is and let me inside.

But Harrison stands in our doorway, places a protective arm around a woman I've never seen before, then glares at me before speaking.

"This is our home. I don't know you. Please leave," he says.

Then my husband slams the door in my face.

3

EDEN

I never cared about what goes on behind closed doors until the door was mine.

I stand and stare at it in disbelief, then I pound my fist on the door.

Nobody answers and it doesn't open.

In desperation, I try my key again but of course it doesn't fit.

Did someone change the locks while I was out for a run?

If this is a joke, it's not funny. I have my first exhibition tonight, I don't have time for this, whatever *this* is. I need to get showered and changed and ready. I need to get into *my* house. I need someone to explain what the fuck is going on.

I ring the doorbell repeatedly, then I push the letterbox open and peer inside, but all I can see is an empty hallway.

It's cold tonight and now that I've stopped running, I'm freezing.

And I'm trembling, but I don't think that's because of the temperature.

"Open this bloody door!" I yell.

Nobody replies.

Nothing about this makes sense. I need my mobile but it is inside the house, along with my purse and my car keys. I could walk

to the village but where would I go? I don't know anyone here yet. I only ever spoke to the art gallery owner over email and once on the phone. I was hoping to meet them in person and make a good impression tonight.

I bang on the door again. This time, when nobody answers, I walk around to the rear of the house. I try the back door but it's locked, as are the windows. The closed curtains and blinds prevent me from seeing inside, but the lights are on. I know they're in there. I'm so cold and confused and I can feel myself starting to crumble. This feels like a bad dream, but I can't seem to wake up. Tonight was important for me, for us. I don't know why Harrison would go along with something like this.

And then the realization hits me. He wouldn't. At least not willingly.

I make my way to the front of the house again and stop when I hear a car in the distance. We live on a lane with no name at the top of the village, there is rarely any traffic, and I wonder if I flag down the driver whether they might be able to help me. But what would I tell them? What could I possibly say that wouldn't make me sound crazy? What I really need to do is contact the police. There is a small police station in Hope Falls – housed inside a former fisherman's cottage – but I doubt it is staffed twenty-four hours. This place isn't exactly a hotbed of crime. Harrison is clearly doing this against his will, which must mean that the woman is dangerous. If I had my phone I'd dial 999, but without it, running to the police station seems like my next best option.

I don't need to.

The sound I heard was a police car, and something like instinct makes me stay in the shadows as it pulls into the drive. I crouch down in the darkness and watch as a uniformed police officer makes his way to the front door. He looks too young, too handsome and surely too inexperienced to handle the situation. Like a child playing

dress-up. I wait and watch as Harrison opens the door, then I listen to him lie.

“I’m sorry to have called you but we didn’t know what else to do. There was a woman banging on the door, insisting that she lives here,” my husband explains to the police officer. “She seemed confused and unstable. She threatened my wife.”

I’m his wife.

I never knew my husband could lie like this.

Hearing him do so makes me feel unsteady on my feet.

The young officer nods his pretty head, runs his hand through his floppy hair, then scribbles something in his notebook before asking for their names.

“I’m Harrison Woolf and my wife is Eden Fox.”

That’s my name, not hers.

An angry voice inside my head tells me to march over there and say something. Demand that he tell the truth. But a calmer voice tells me to stay hidden, keep quiet for now, try to understand what is going on here.

“And you’ve never seen this woman before?” the officer asks.

“No. Never,” Harrison says, and the lie is so convincing I almost believe it myself. “My wife and I only moved in a few weeks ago and this area felt so safe until now.”

“I assure you Hope Falls is one of the safest places to live in the county. Lowest crime rates in all of Cornwall,” the child police officer tells him proudly, as though he is personally responsible for this statistic. He seems to believe everything Harrison is telling him, but why wouldn’t he? My husband has outsmarted him, but then my husband outsmarts everyone, that’s just who he is.

“Would it be possible to speak to your wife?” the officer asks Harrison then, and I experience a tiny glimmer of hope. “It would be helpful to get a description of the woman from both of you.”

“I’m afraid my wife suffers from migraines and has had to take