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Everything You Told Me

Written by Lucy Dawson

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Everything You Told Me

Lucy Dawson



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For the Warwick girls, with love.

CHAPTER ONE

'Hey. Wake up, please! You have to wake up now.'

The man's voice sounds curiously distant. I try to do as I'm told, but my eyes feel stuck together – as if I haven't taken off last night's clumpy mascara. Forcing them apart, and squinting, the blurry shape of a head is actually right in front of me, backlit by a small, bright, overhead light. I stare at it groggily and try to focus.

'You have to get out of the car!'

I move, and immediately, a sharp pain grips at the base of my neck from being in one position too long. I'm uncomfortably sprawled across the back seat, with my head jammed against the left passenger door, and my chin on my chest. I attempt to sit up, but my hands only manage to grasp at the air, and I slip a little further, until I finally manage to grab the passenger seat in front with one hand, push down with the other, and haul myself up. My God – I've not had a hangover this bad in nearly twenty years, since I was a student. I moan, and rub my head, before looking down at myself in confusion. I'm wearing pyjamas, the wax jacket my husband refers to as my 'mummy mac', and an old pair of trainers.

'Where am I?' My speech is slurred. I can hear it, I can *feel* it, as if my tongue is a fat, useless slug.

'We are here.'

Yes, but where *is* here? I look around me, completely confused. It's dark outside. I turn back to the blurry head.

'You have to pay me now.'

He has a foreign accent I can't place.

'Pay me now, please. Four hundred pounds.'

Did he just say *four hundred pounds*?

'In your pocket.' He points at me, impatiently.

I stare at him stupidly, my mouth still slightly open. He's young – only in his mid-twenties – thin, a concave chest under a cheap, grubby jumper, with dark, greasy hair and darting eyes, waiting anxiously.

'Come on!' He rubs his thumb and finger together, and points at my coat again.

I reach slowly into one of the pockets, and to my surprise, withdraw a tight roll of notes that has an elastic band around the middle.

'Ah!' he exclaims with satisfaction.

Obediently, I hold it out and he snatches it from me, pulling the band off and quickly shuffling through the notes, counting under his breath.

'Four hundred pounds exactly. Thank you.' He reaches up and clicks the interior light off.

For a moment I'm blind; it's only as my eyes begin to adjust I can see that it's actually starting to turn light outside. The sky is an electric blue, blending down first into yellow and then orange hues almost too perfectly, as if it's been airbrushed. My gaze drops to the dark horizon line slicing through the orange – and a wide expanse of indigo and silvery sea. I gasp as I realize we are on a cliff, overlooking a bay. The tide is in, rolling relentlessly onto a small, exposed stretch of beach on my right. On the opposite side of the hill sits a large hotel; the ground-floor windows all lit up, probably the staff starting to prepare for the

day ahead while the guests are still asleep. I know this place, I've been here before, many times. This is *our* place.

'We're in Cornwall,' I say in disbelief. 'But, how…' I spin around urgently and look out of the back window. 'What the hell am I doing in Cornwall?' I say, frightened.

The man shrugs. 'You have to get out now.'

'Get out?' I say. 'What do you mean? I have no idea what I'm doing here!' I reach into my jacket pockets. They are completely empty. No phone, no keys, no purse. I look about me wildly, starting to panic. 'How did I even get into your car? Where did you pick me up from?'

The man looks at me curiously, as if he's not sure whether I'm joking or not.

'I was at my house, in Kent, right?' I question him frantically. 'I was at home. I know I was. Theo and Chloe!' I exclaim suddenly. 'My children! Where are my children?' I lean forward and grab the edge of his sleeve.

Unnerved, he shakes me off. 'I don't know anything. I just drove you here, like I was asked. Get out of the car!'

'But—'

'No!' He refuses, leaning over and flinging open the back door. He gives me a shove. I half fall out, planting my feet down onto soft earth as the shock of the cold air sucks into my gut, and I vomit.

'Not on the seats!' he shouts, angrily.

I hang there for a moment, spit dangling from my lip as I try to catch my breath, but he pushes me again, harder this time, and I stumble to a stand. He quickly yanks the door shut behind me, turns, starts the engine and roars off. It's obvious all he wants to do is get as far away as possible. I watch him helplessly, the wind whipping my hair across my face and making my eyes water as I stand on the exposed hilltop, next to the costal path, completely disorientated.

I don't understand. I went to bed at my house last night, I know I did. How on earth am I now at the other end of the country?

I need help.

I try to walk, but my legs don't seem to belong to me, and, stumbling a couple of steps in the direction of the hotel, I trip on the uneven ground, landing on my knees. The damp from the grass starts to seep through the flimsy fabric of my pyjamas, and as I drag myself up, my whole body feels weirdly disconnected. Standing is making me dizzy. I try another step, but in my confusion, somehow only stagger towards the edge of the cliff.

'Shit!' I gasp, terrified. I should just sit down again, this is too dangerous, I can't—

'Stop!' An urgent voice carries over the air buffeting about my head, and I twist to look over my shoulder. A man is running fast towards me. There is a dog slightly ahead of him, ears flat to its head as it pelts in my direction. It's a collie, and when it reaches me, it begins to leap around, barking madly, its paws scrabbling painfully on my legs. I shriek instinctively and take a step back.

'No!' shouts the man, and in three strides he's there, grabbing my arms and knocking me bodily to the ground. I fall with such force, the back of my head smacks into the turf – and then there is silence.

'Hello! Can you hear me? What's your name?'

My eyes flicker open again. A woman, very close up, is staring down into my face in concern. 'She's conscious. What's your name?' She waits, and I realize she's addressing me.

'Sally.' My mouth is horribly dry, and speaking aloud makes me cough. 'Sally Hilman.'

Some man next to her, who I didn't know was there, appears in my eye line, saying aloud, 'We've got an ID.'

I try to sit up, and several hands reach out to stop me.

'Try not to move, Sally,' the woman says kindly. 'We're just checking you over, if that's OK? Making sure you haven't hurt yourself. Stay still just a moment longer for me, I'm nearly done. My name is Marie, and this is Paul. We're paramedics.'

I don't actually have the strength to argue. I turn my head to the side dully, and several pairs of feet about five yards away swim into focus. My gaze travels up the legs, and I see the dog man talking to two police officers. They are standing by a police car that has the blue light flashing, and an ambulance.

'She was kneeling down on the ground, praying—'

No I wasn't, I'd fallen over.

'—then she stood up and started walking towards the edge,' says the man eagerly, holding a rope lead tightly, on the end of which his dog is still leaping around excitedly. Why is he wearing full camouflage combats and top? He looks like a soldier reporting in to his next-in-command.

'—I got closer, and she was crying. Really distressed.'

That's not right either. I wasn't crying. The wind was making my eyes water.

No one says anything, they just carry on checking me. I did just say all of that out loud, didn't I?

'I knew something was wrong and I called to her again to stop,' the dog man says. 'I could see she was going to do it, so I, like, *ran* as fast as I could, and pulled her to the ground. We've been trained to do that in the TA. She did bang her head a bit, but then she just sort of went to sleep. It was weird. Once I knew she wasn't faking it, I let go of her arms and called you. I checked her too, just in case she was carrying one of those EpiPens or wearing an "I'm a diabetic" bracelet, but she didn't have *anything*, just the note.'

My eyes widen. Note? What note? What the hell is he talking about?

'I need to get home,' I plead, reaching out to put my hand on Marie's arm, to get her attention. 'My children…'

'Where are they, Sally?' she asks. 'Are they with someone, or on their own?'

'Their father and my mother-in-law are with them.'

'And where do you live, Sally?'

I tell her, and she replies soothingly, 'That's great. We'll sort everything out. It's all going to be OK… She seems physically fine.' She looks away, talking to her male colleague.

'You don't understand,' I whisper in distress, starting to cry. 'My son is only a baby. He'll be needing me.'

'—I knew it wasn't right because of the way she was acting, and people come here to jump all the time.' The dog man is still talking. 'I've got a mate who knows the coroner, and he says body parts wash up loads. Limbs and that,' he adds fervently.

Jump? What's he talking about?

'I wasn't going to jump!' I say to Marie, frightened. 'I nearly fell, but I wasn't doing it deliberately!'

'It's all right, Sally. You don't have to talk now.'

'But I wasn't! Get off me!' I push her hands away, and try to struggle up. Instantly, one of the policemen is alongside us.

'No one is going to hurt you. We're here to help.' He speaks kindly. 'We're making sure your children are all right. Sally, I'm detaining you under section 136 of the Mental Health Act.'

'What?' I say, terrified. 'I haven't done anything!'

'The ambulance is going to bring you down to the police station for now. I'll come with you – it's not far from here – and we'll get everything sorted out, OK? Don't worry. It's all going to be fine.'

'—Anyway, here's the suicide note. I found it in an inside pocket of her coat – tucked well away. I think it's to her husband. See?' The dog man points to something on a small scrap of paper the

other policeman is now reading. 'She's definitely married, because she's wearing a ring.' He looks very pleased with himself, and proud. 'Matthew, his name is.'

My mouth falls open. 'My husband's name *is* Matthew,' I say to the other officer, urgently. 'But I didn't write a suicide note, I swear! I went to bed last night at home in Kent, I was waiting for my husband to get home, and then I woke up in the back of a taxi, here.'

'You don't remember anything that happened in between?' Marie asks, casually. 'Literally not a thing?'

'No,' I say, terrified, as I realize it aloud. 'I had a really bad day yesterday, and I argued with someone just before I went to bed, but I *did* get into bed. I'm certain of that, because I wasn't feeling too good. I'd had a couple of drinks, and because I'm not drinking much at the moment it made me feel really queasy… I must have just fallen asleep – so how am I now *here*?' I look around me in disbelief again.

'You don't remember how you got here, but you're certain you didn't come here to jump?'

'Of course I am! At least, I *think* I am…' I trail off, bewildered. 'Did I really have a note in my pocket? Can I see it?'

A small scrap of paper is held out in front of me. The policeman's hand is covering most of it, but I can see the first line.

Dear Matthew,
I don't want to do this any more.

My heart stops – it's my handwriting. I look around me in confusion. I went to bed last night in my house three hundred miles away, and now I'm on a clifftop in Cornwall, holding a suicide note that I've written.

What the hell has happened? How have I lost the last ten hours of my life?