

PROLOGUE

It's that time of year again. The time the glacier gives up bodies.

The immense mass of ice up there is a frozen river that flows too slowly for the eye to see. Recent victims brush shoulders with older ones in its glassy depths. Some emerge at the top, others at the snout, and there's no way of knowing who will come out next.

It can take years for them to reappear. Decades even. A glacier in neighbouring Italy made the news recently when it produced the mummified corpses of First World War soldiers, complete with helmets and rifles.

Still, what goes in must eventually come out, so I've been checking the local news every morning.

There's one particular body that I'm waiting for.

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‘Hello?’ My shout echoes around the concrete cavern.

The familiar red-and-white cable car sits in the bay, but there’s nobody in the operator booth. The sun has disappeared behind the Alps, the sky is pink, yet there isn’t a single light on in the building. Where is everyone?

An icy wind blasts my cheeks. I huddle deeper into my jacket. It’s the off season and the resort doesn’t open for another month so I didn’t expect the other ski lifts to be running, but I thought this one would be. How else are we going to get up to the glacier? Have I got the wrong day?

I dump my snowboard bag on the platform and pull out my phone to check the email again. *Know it’s been a while but are you up for a reunion weekend? Panorama building, glacier du Diable, Le Rocher. Meet at the cable car, 5 p.m. Friday 7th November. C. x*

C for Curtis. If anyone else had invited me here, I’d have deleted it without replying.

‘Yo, Milla!’

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ALLIE REYNOLDS

And here's Brent loping up the steps towards me. Two years younger than me, he must be thirty-one now and he still has his boyish charm – the floppy dark hair, the dimples – though he looks worn and tired.

He lifts me off the ground in a bear hug. I hug him tightly back. All those cold nights I spent in his bed. I feel bad for not getting in contact with him. But after what happened . . . Anyway, he didn't contact me either.

Over his shoulder, sharp peaks loom, in shadow against the darkening sky. Do I really want to do this? It's not too late. I could make excuses, jump back in my car and drive home to Sheffield.

A throat clears behind us. We pull apart to see Curtis's tall, blond form.

Somehow I expected Curtis to look the same as the last time I saw him. Collapsed with grief. A broken man. But of course he doesn't. He's had ten years to get over it. Or tuck it all away inside him.

Curtis's hug is brief. 'Good to see you, Milla.'

'You too.' I always struggled to look him in the eye because he was so damned good-looking – still is – but I find it even harder now.

Curtis and Brent grip hands, Curtis's skin pale against Brent's. They've brought their snowboards; no surprises there. We could hardly go up the mountain without them. Like me, they wear jeans, but I'm amused to see shirt collars underneath their snowboard jackets.

'Hope I wasn't expected to dress up,' I say.

Curtis looks me up and down. 'You'll do.'

I swallow. His eyes are as blue as ever, but they remind me of someone I don't want to think of. There's none of

SHIVER

the warmth I used to feel from him either. For him I dragged myself back to the place I swore I'd never return to. I'm already regretting it.

'Who else is coming?' Brent says.

Why's he looking at me?

'No idea,' I say.

Curtis laughs. 'Don't you know?'

Footsteps. Here comes Heather. And who's that? *Dale?*
No way – are they still together?

Dale's previously wild hair is stylishly cut, his piercings removed. His trendy skate shoes don't even look skated in. I guess he's been Heathered. At least she let him bring his snowboard.

Heather's wearing a dress – a sparkly black one – with tights and knee-high boots. Must be bloody freezing, even with the Puffa jacket over it. A whiff of hairspray from her long dark locks as she hugs me.

'Great to see you, Milla.' She must have had a few drinks before she got here because she almost sounds like she means it. Her boots have a three-inch heel, bringing her to an inch taller than me, which is probably why she's wearing them.

She flashes a ring.

'You guys got married?' I say. 'Congratulations.'

'Three years now.' Her Geordie accent is thicker than ever.

Brent and Curtis slap Dale's back.

'Took your time askin', hey bro?' Brent says. His London accent seems stronger too.

'Actually, I asked him,' Heather snaps.

The door of the cable car grinds open. A lift attendant

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shuffles up behind us, black resort cap pulled low. He checks off our names on a clipboard and gestures for us to enter.

The others file past.

‘Is that everyone?’ I say, playing for time.

The liftie seems to think so. There’s something familiar about him.

Everyone else is aboard now. Reluctantly I join them.

‘Who else would there be anyway?’ Curtis says.

‘True,’ I say. There were a few others who came and went, but of our original gang, we’re the only five left.

Or rather, the only ones still standing.

A flood of guilt hits me. *She will never walk again.*

The liftie shuts the door. I strain to see his face but before I can get a better look, he heads off along the platform and disappears to his booth.

The cable car lurches into motion. Like me, the others stare through the plexiglass spellbound as we fly over the tops of fir trees, chasing the fading light up the mountain. It’s weird to see dirt and grass below. It was always snow. I look for marmots but they’re probably hibernating. We pass over a cliff and the tiny village of Le Rocher disappears from view.

Suspended in the air like this, with the scenery slipping past the window, I get the strangest feeling. Instead of rising up the mountain, it’s like we’re travelling back in time. And I don’t know if I’m ready to face the past.

Too late. The cable car is swinging into the mid-station already. We step out, dragging our bags. It’s colder here and it’ll be colder still where we’re going. A French flag flaps in the breeze. The plateau is deserted. Halfway up, the browns and greens turn to white: the snowline.