ANTHONY KESSEL

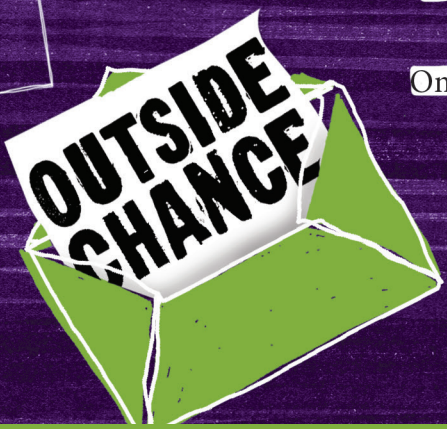
Come on!' she screamed. 'You're a detective, so work it out!'

Edie knew exactly what she had to do next

DON'T DOUBT THE RAINBOW

Edie wasn't going to give up yet

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ANTHONY
KESSEL

DON'T DOUBT THE RAINBOW



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To Ethan – a really great guy

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PROLOGUE: THINGS CHANGE

It was a strange and discomforting feeling, not knowing how you'd arrived at the place that you found yourself in. But thinking about that was a luxury Edie couldn't afford right now. She came quickly to her senses and knew she was in big trouble.

First, Edie had to get out of the space in which she was trapped – the cupboard that contained all the overalls for art class. She pushed the ones on hangers aside and used her feet to shift them onto the floor out of the way. Luckily, there was a little light coming through the cracks around the cupboard doors, but it flickered annoyingly, interrupting Edie's ability to see what she was doing.

Was that a paint pot next to her feet? Edie leant down and grabbed the object. It was, and she used it to bang as hard as she could on the inside of the cupboard doors. She had tried with her fists briefly already, and had hollered as loud as she could, but nobody had come to her rescue. Maybe the clanging of ceramic on wood would help. It didn't, and Edie was starting to get worried. And hot, very hot. She took off her sheepskin coat, way too thick for indoors, and let it drop to the floor. Next came the school blazer. In a moment of brief illumination, Edie was reminded of the T-shirt she

was wearing underneath: pink letters on the front read 'Catch Me If You Can'. Somebody clearly had.

Frustrated, Edie whacked the paint pot on the back of the lock. The pot shattered into pieces, one cutting deep into her right hand. A glimmer of light showed blood streaking down her palm towards her wrist. Edie yelled out, a guttural shriek of anger and desperation. All that was left now, she thought, was brute force, so she took a step back and a breath in. Pursing her lips and pulling her arms together to strengthen her upper body, Edie shoulder barged the door.

There was an encouraging creak but it didn't budge. Edie stepped back again, gathered her energy and slammed herself against the door. The wood around the hinges cracked, the right-hand door gave way and Edie tumbled out. Winded from the fall, Edie started to pull herself upright off the floor, but immediately realised that her problems had only just begun.

As she stood, it was the temperature that struck her first, like a blanket of thick, unwanted heat. Edie looked around her classroom and quickly saw what the trouble was. Flames were licking at the wooden blinds on the far external wall – the wall with a door and windows to the outside playground. It looked as if the fire might have started in a rubbish bin in the corner, which was already charred, but Edie couldn't be sure. And it didn't really matter at this stage.

Then the smoke hit her. The first wave made her gasp, and Edie's hand moved instinctively to her throat. She remembered school fire safety training: the firefighter had told them that it's often the smoke that kills people rather

than the flames. He had conveyed something else that was important, really important. Now, what was it? Edie closed her eyes tight and tried to recall. 'Come on!' she screamed to herself. 'You're a detective, work it out!' Oh yes, if you're ever in a fire stick close to the floor, where there is less smoke, and try to crawl to safety. Choking, Edie got down on her knees.

Steadily, she made her way over to the back wall, away from the flames, where she knew the main door to the internal corridor was located. So far, so good, Edie thought, as the heat seemed less intense further from the windows. Her heart sank, however, as she pulled down on the door handle. It wouldn't move. She tried to turn the lock underneath but that wouldn't shift either. Edie cursed: who would want to do this to her – trap her in a cupboard and then in a blazing classroom? The doors on the new Highgate Hill school building were so solid that there was no chance of getting out that way.

Although her mind told her not to get close to the fire, Edie realised that her options were limited. She looked around – the flames were beginning to encircle her, spreading along both side walls. The whiteboard had darkened and coloured pen marks were dripping down the surface. On the opposite wall, Edie saw her friends' contributions to the term's India project gradually turning to ash. First, Allegra's poster of the Taj Mahal, then Yasmina's 3D wall-hanging of the Himalayas and, finally, Edie's favourite: the gorgeous tiger mosaic by Lizzie. It was strange, though, as the creations reminded Edie of primary rather than secondary school. Regardless, they were all gone in seconds.

Edie crawled slowly towards the far wall with the windows. Every breath burned her throat now and thick smoke raked at her lungs. Yet, despite the developing furnace she spluttered on, the temperature almost unbearable. As she reached the wall, Edie leaned upwards to grab the handle of the door to the playground. She grimaced as it scalded her already bloodied palm, and instinctively recoiled. On the floor was a rag, which Edie wrapped around her sorry hand, and then yanked down hard on the handle. Like the other door, this was locked too.

Edie wasn't going to give up quite yet, though. One thing that her mum had taught her was to be a fighter. She stood up tentatively, aware of how dizzy she was beginning to feel, and used both hands to raise the classroom chair next to her above her head. With all the power she could muster, Edie smashed the chair against the window. In a form of defiance, the window bounced the chair straight back at her. Edie tried once more, but again it was in vain.

Tears welled in Edie's eyes and she collapsed helplessly back to the ground. What was there left to do? Still on her knees she peered upwards, as if searching for assistance from the Almighty, but no hand of God came down to help her. Instead, Edie saw thick smoke gathering. Embedded in the ceiling were the smoke alarms and sprinklers, oblivious to the deathly situation. What on earth was going on? Why hadn't they been activated by the fire? The world was still against Edie, it seemed, and she was desperate.

With no idea what to do next, Edie staggered towards the desks in the corner. She knew she was close to passing

out and could barely breathe. She crawled underneath one of the desks and just sat there. Was this it – the end of her short life? The end of her detective hopes and dreams? She wondered if her brother, Eli, would miss her or even care. Everything seemed so unfair, so terribly unfair, and Edie just couldn't understand why this was happening to her.

The sobbing intensified as Edie's mind drifted in and out of thoughts and consciousness. This was it, and what an awful way to go; in a place where her happiness had been shattered at some point back in time that she couldn't quite grasp. And alone, all alone. Edie was crying uncontrollably now, and everything around her was turning to black. She reached her arms out in front of her.

'Mum … I want you, Mum,' she wailed.

Leaning forwards, a little quieter now: 'Where are you, Mum …?'

Blubbering, losing a sense of her surroundings: 'Mum, where are you?'

And then Edie felt arms around her shoulders, pulling her forwards and embracing her. Confused, she opened her eyes into the darkness.

'It's okay, sweetie – you're safe,' came a voice.

And she knew she was, as Edie became aware of the familiarity of her bedroom.

'You're alright,' the deep voice comforted her. 'You're alright.'

'I want Mum,' Edie bawled into her father's neck.

There was a moment's silence as Dad held Edie tight. 'I know, sweetie,' he said softly. 'I miss Mum too.'



CHAPTER 1

THE BABYSITTER

When Edie finally re-awoke in the morning, the first thing she noticed was the broken blind on her window overlooking the back garden. She didn't bother using the curtains, thick hand-me-downs from the au pair's room of a few years back, and relied on the black-out roller blind to keep the room dark. Or dark-ish. The blind was at a slight angle, so didn't quite reach the bottom. The mechanism was broken: Dad hadn't fixed it for weeks, despite the promises. Not that Edie really cared, especially at weekends when she enjoyed watching dust motes floating in the sunbeams streaming through the gap in the blind, comforted by the knowledge that there was no need to get up for school.

A glance at the clock on her bedside table showed it was 11:37. No point in breakfast now, Edie thought. It was almost lunchtime; might as well stay in bed a little longer. A thin, sad smile spread across Edie's face as she remembered that Dad had stayed with her for quite some time in the night after her troubling dream. An hour, maybe two? Edie couldn't be sure, which meant she'd fallen asleep with him stroking her head – that always worked. Over the past three months, Edie had got closer and closer to Dad, which was heartening. She shared more and he listened more. And he

accepted Edie more: an acceptance, or appreciation, based on a deeper understanding of who Edie really was. The bond was stronger and Dad was more available if Edie needed him – and not just for car rides to the station. He was a good dad; she'd forgive him the broken blind.

Edie reached over and grabbed her iPhone from next to the clock. House rules meant it should be turned off at night, so she pressed the power button and within moments she was reconnected to the world. First up, all the overnight WhatsApp messages: there were a bunch from two different school chat groups, but Edie immediately went to her private chat with Lizzie. Accompanied by an angled shot of her best friend's head on a pillow was one message, sent an hour earlier:

What's up, Sherlock? Lunch in Crouch End? XX

After a quick response, Edie threw back the duvet and sat upright. She contemplated what the weekend promised: detective work for sure, with a couple of cases that she needed to progress; time with Lizzie, keen to be her Dr Watson; perhaps a little shopping in Camden Town; babysitting for a neighbour; and, easy to forget, bat mitzvah class at the synagogue on Sunday. On her fingers, Edie counted down, slightly nervously, from June: one, two, three, four … just over six-and-a-half months before the big event. No complaining, she was the one who'd insisted on having the coming-of-age Jewish celebration, delayed from her thirteenth birthday because of Mum's death.

Stretching, Edie stood up and took a few paces over to her desk. She'd created a good working space, modelled on her mum's highly organised office area. As she looked at the tidy surface, Edie remembered one of Mum's mottos: an ordered desk means an ordered mind. And you needed that to solve crimes.

Edie inspected the in-tray she'd marked 'Current Cases'. At this stage, each ongoing numbered investigation had its own see-through plastic wallet and sticky label. Top of the pile was the case she'd provisionally named 'Ethan Stephenson', which had come to her attention just a few days earlier. Edie felt that Ethan was a kindred spirit as they'd both lost a parent, and she was happy to spend more time with him. Ethan's case file was blank at the moment, but she would find out more this weekend.

Next up, 'Missing Dogs'. This was an odd one. Edie had been contacted by a Mrs Solomon whose dog had disappeared on Hampstead Heath. Having failed to get any support from the police, the woman had reached out to Edie after reading about the schoolgirl's heroic exploits in the *Ham and High*. At first, the case reminded Edie of other banal ones she'd been approached about, given her rising profile and popularity. Most of these were from kids at school: lost mobile phones, hacked computer accounts, social media problems. Others were from random adults, such as letters that had never arrived or stolen tyres. All of these uninteresting cases were sitting unsolved in plastic folders at the bottom of the pile – not exactly material for a supersleuth. However, on hearing of two other dogs that had disappeared in the vicinity over

the previous month, Edie's interest had been piqued. This missing dogs case needed looking into further, which she planned to do later in the day.

After throwing on a pair of leggings, white T-shirt and navy hoodie borrowed from Dad, Edie caught sight of the grey cardboard box file marked 'Completed Cases', sitting above the desk at one end of a white shelf. Edie didn't need to open it to know how little lay inside – and nothing that came anywhere close to the magnitude of Creation.

Edie needed her fortunes to change.



Downstairs in the playroom, Eli grunted in response to Edie's greeting. Glued to his FIFA video game, her brother was playing against a friend while simultaneously FaceTiming the same opponent. Each player could therefore hear what was going on in the other's home, which meant self-conscious Eli didn't want anyone around, and made his feelings clear to his loitering sister.

'In the middle of a game!' he stated forcibly.

Ejected from the children's space, Edie climbed the few steps to the main hallway and skulked into the lounge, where Dad was sitting comfortably in his favourite armchair in the far corner by the window, newspaper in hand.

'Anything interesting happening in the world today?' Edie asked as she made her way across the room.

'Oh,' Dad replied. 'Not really. Just doing the crossword. Want to help?' Before Edie could respond, he added with a

smile, 'After all, you never know where solving a crossword clue might lead …'

Edie grinned and sat on the large sofa.

'Thanks, but I think I might go and meet Lizzie in Crouch End for a bit, if that's okay?'

'Sounds alright,' Dad replied. 'Thanks for checking. Any other plans for today?'

Edie told Dad about going to see the woman about the lost dog, then babysitting later.

'Well, take your keys with you as I'll be out with Eli at football training this afternoon.' Dad paused before adding: 'And, just so you know, Miss Watson will be coming over this evening for dinner, and we'll probably watch a movie.'

Edie bristled. Somehow it just didn't feel right, Dad with another woman. That person being the school art teacher just made matters worse – although, secretly, Edie quite liked her.

'You can call her Emmeline,' Edie responded tetchily, 'not "Miss Watson" all the time.' She stood up: 'Anyway, I'm going out now, so I'll see you later.' As Dad refused to be provoked, Edie stopped at the lounge door, turned and threw a softer remark over her shoulder: 'Love you, Dad!'

'Love you too, sweetheart. Be careful. And stay in touch … text me.'

'I will!' the young detective promised, although often she didn't.



The afternoon proved to be a strange one. When Edie arrived at Costa Coffee in Crouch End, Lizzie wasn't there. She waited fifteen minutes before Lizzie eventually arrived, unapologetic and without much of an explanation. They chatted for a while and had a hot chocolate, but Lizzie wasn't her normal bubbly self. Edie checked if everything was alright, which revealed nothing, then suggested that Lizzie join her on the visit to Hampstead Garden Suburb.

Her offer was declined, so Edie took the 210 bus alone. She arrived at number 62 bang on three o'clock, rang the bell and waited. Nobody answered and no dog barked, so she rang again. A minute later, Edie knocked on the door with her knuckles, painfully, but still the front door failed to open, so she called Mrs Solomon on the mobile number she'd provided. The call went through to answerphone, so she left a message.

Over the next half an hour, Edie repeated the whole cycle twice more, but to no avail. There was no car in the driveway and no signs of life. Through the windows, she observed a very neat home; from the decor it was probably lived in by an older person, which fitted with Edie's sense of Mrs Solomon's age, based on the emails and one short telephone conversation. Something didn't seem right, though: Mrs Solomon had sounded serious about her missing dog and very keen on meeting Edie, so where was she?

Eventually, Edie returned home. Back in her room, she spent a few hours doing not very much, before preparing to head out again. Putting on her coat and shoes in the hallway, she heard a voice.

'Hello, Edie,' announced Miss Watson, who'd appeared without a sound from the kitchen. With her wavy auburn hair straightened, the school teacher looked even prettier than normal.

'Oh, hello Miss Watson,' Edie had been hoping to avoid such an encounter.

'How's your weekend going? Doing anything interesting?'

Dad appeared behind the school teacher, providing Edie with the opening she needed. She grabbed her keys and half-turned at the front door.

'No, nothing interesting, just babysitting. I've got to go now, Dad … I'm late for Max's mum!'

Edie closed the front door behind her and started walking the ten houses to the right on Cecile Park to begin her babysitting duties.



'Hello, Edie,' greeted the neighbour.

'Hi, Mrs Redmond,' replied Edie with a charming smile. 'Sorry I'm a bit late.'

'You're not late,' added the well-groomed woman in her late thirties, glancing at the wall clock. 'Well, maybe a couple of minutes. But it really doesn't matter. We're in good time. Come inside,' she beckoned. 'And please don't call me Mrs Redmond. It's Donna.'

Edie followed the woman into the hallway which, with its brown-and-white original Edwardian floor tiles, looked remarkably similar to Edie's own home. But the ground floor

layout was different, completely open plan, and Edie was led to the kitchen area at the far end, where Donna pointed to a bar stool at the counter.

'Have a seat. Do you want anything to drink?'

'Oh, I'm fine, thank you.'

'Are you sure? Maybe a Coke, orange juice … or some water?'

'Okay then. A Coke, please.'

Donna took a large bottle of Diet Coke from the fridge, decanted some into a glass and added ice. As she placed it in front of Edie, a quiet voice sounded from the living room, near the bottom of the stairs.

'I can't sleep,' announced four-year-old Max, causing both Donna and Edie to turn round together.

'What are you doing up, Max?' asked the boy's mum. 'You're supposed to be in bed.'

'I told you. I can't sleep.'

Donna looked at her watch as she walked over: 'It's well past your bedtime, my friend.' She leant down to pick up her son, dressed in his favourite Spiderman pyjamas, but he wriggled assertively out of her arms. 'Come on, Max, please,' Donna insisted. 'Daddy and I are going out for dinner.'

'I want Edie to read me a story,' Max declared forcibly.

'But she's just arrived,' replied his mum. 'And I've got to finish getting ready.'

'I don't mind reading him a story,' Edie intervened.

Donna peered over her shoulder at Edie: 'Are you sure?'

'Really,' Edie insisted. 'I don't mind at all.' Edie looked over at Max's beaming smile, then added, 'It'll be fun.'

'Well, thank you, Edie. That's very nice.' Donna focused back on her son: 'Just ten minutes, Max. Do you understand? Ten minutes.'

He nodded, prompting Edie to make her way across the room towards him. Halfway there, however, Donna surprised her babysitter.

'Edie, once you've finished with Max, there's something I'd like to talk to you about before Scott and I go out for dinner.' Edie looked over uncertainly. 'It's personal,' she added, 'but it won't take long. It's to do with your …' Donna pursed her lips as if unsure how to express herself. 'It's to do with your detective stuff.'



Fifteen minutes later, Edie and Donna were sitting on the sofa in the lounge. Despite his initial enthusiasm, Max hadn't stayed awake beyond the fox meeting the mouse in *The Gruffalo*, after which Edie had checked in on his two-and-a-half-year-old sister, Olivia, fast asleep in her cot in the room next door. As Donna applied her make-up, her husband, Scott, had explained to Edie what to do should either child wake up, including showing her how to warm some milk. Although Edie was on the young side for babysitting toddlers, the neighbours trusted her intelligence and common sense. Scott had then gone back upstairs to get ready, leaving his wife and Edie alone.

'Right,' started Donna, her tone hushed and hesitant. 'Right …' she repeated, staring past the girl, her eyes darting upwards.

'What's the matter, Mrs Red … I mean, Donna?' Edie asked gently.

Donna smiled. 'It's a little hard to explain … and a little, well … peculiar … but let me start at the beginning.'

'Okay.'

Donna exhaled. 'When I was at university – Cambridge University – I had a close friend … a best friend, actually. Her name was Rachel Summers. We met on the first day … queuing up for freshers' ID.'

'What are freshers?' Edie asked.

'Oh, sorry. Freshers are freshmen – meaning it's your first year at university.'

'Just a sec,' interrupted Edie. 'I'd like to take some notes, if that's okay?'

'Sure,' Donna agreed. Edie reached into her school bag and pulled out her maths notebook, which she opened at the inside back page. Not imagining babysitting duties taking this turn, Edie hadn't brought her Supersleuth stationery with her, so she had to make do.

'You said you met on the first day,' Edie prompted.

'Yes, we were waiting for our ID passes and started chatting and … well … we got on brilliantly from the moment we met. Although we were studying different subjects, we were both at the same college – Queens' College – and at Cambridge it's the main place to socialise, for friends … sports … and it's where you sleep … in one of their halls of residence.'

'Okay,' Edie said. 'So you became good friends?'

'Much more than that, Edie. We became incredibly close … and were virtually inseparable. Yes, there were boys

and parties – and our studies – but Rachel and I were like soulmates. We spent almost all our spare time together.'

'Can I ask a question?'

'Yes, of course.'

'You said you were studying different subjects. What were they?'

'Right,' said Donna. 'Rachel was studying medicine, initially, then switched to psychology after the first year. I was studying engineering.'

'Engineering?'

'Yes,' Donna was accustomed to people's surprise at her subject choice. 'I loved sciences at school, especially physics, so engineering was a natural path.'

After jotting down a few points, Edie probed: 'And what do you do now, if you don't mind me asking? For a job?'

'I don't mind you asking at all, Edie.' Donna smiled. 'After my course finished, I stayed in Cambridge and did a PhD, and after that I got a job working for the government – over ten years ago – and I've been there ever since.'

'For government?' Edie queried. 'Like, in politics?'

'No, definitely not politics for me!' Donna clarified with another grin. 'Security services.'

'Do you mean you're, like, a spy?' Edie's mind whirred. 'Did you hear about my mum's case?'

Donna frowned but otherwise remained impassive. 'I did indeed hear about your mum's case – she was a very courageous woman … Now, don't you want to know the rest of my story?'

'Absolutely,' assured Edie, her intrigue rising.

'Well, as I said, Rachel and I were best friends until halfway through our final year at Cambridge. Then, all of a sudden, we had a big falling out.' Donna paused, as if troubled by the memory.

'What happened?' Edie asked.

Donna looked past Edie towards the stairs that led up to their bedroom, where her husband was still getting ready. 'It was because of a boy, as you might imagine.' Donna brushed her straightened long brown hair away from her eyes. 'Rachel was absolutely besotted by this boy – who was also at Queens' – and we talked about him endlessly. He was doing a master's degree in international relations. He was handsome, funny, captain of the college football team … Rachel became infatuated, although he never showed any interest in her.'

Edie was drawn in: 'So, what happened?'

'I had an affair with him,' Donna stated abruptly. 'No, sorry, not an affair – that's the wrong word. We had a kiss at the Valentine's Day college party and then started going out. Rachel was hysterical when she found out … mad at me … inconsolable. She completely froze me out … refused to meet … to talk … and, well, that was it. We never spoke to each other again. It was incredibly sad.'

Shocked, Edie looked her neighbour straight in the eye. There had been fallings out with Lizzie from time to time, but she couldn't imagine things ever getting that extreme. Edie checked: 'You never spoke again?'

'No, we never spoke again … and even avoided places where we might see each other. We finished our degrees in

the summer and went our different ways. Some years ago, I learned from another Cambridge friend that Rachel had emigrated to Canada a few months after graduation – and, as far as I'm aware, nobody has heard from her since.'

'And what about this guy … this man?' Edie asked.

'Oh,' said Donna. 'He's upstairs. It was Scott.'



As if hearing his name, Scott shouted down that they needed to leave in ten minutes, otherwise they would miss the dinner reservation. Donna was ready, smartly dressed in pristine tapered jeans and a black jacket – with her handbag sitting on a console table near the front door. She folded her hands on her lap and straightened herself, as if she meant business.

'Let me get to the point, Edie. All of that was just the background, which you needed to know, but things began to get a bit … how can I put it … weird … yes, weird … about two weeks ago.'

Her attention ratcheted up a notch, Edie noted the time period in her notebook: 'What happened?'

'Okay, so this is quite hard to explain, even for a scientist … no, especially for a scientist! About two weeks ago, I was shopping in Covent Garden and took a break to watch the street performers on the piazza.'

'Oh, yes,' Edie nodded. 'I went there with my mum a couple of times.'

'Right. Well, I was watching a mime artist, along with … I don't know … about thirty other people. As he did

his Marcel Marceau act, I was looking across the semicircle of people and … there she was. Rachel, or at least I thought it was her. Rachel used to have light-brown hair. The woman in the crowd had similar hair colour but with some darker brown … probably dyed. And she had large dark sunglasses on. Besides that, I was fairly sure it was Rachel.'

'Did she see you?'

'No, she seemed transfixed by the mime performance.'

'So, what did you do?'

'Nothing. My stomach sort of heaved … the surprise of it all … but I composed myself and walked away.'

'Okay.' Edie's eyes narrowed. 'It sounds like a coincidence. If it *was* Rachel, she may have been on a visit to see family. Or maybe she's moved back to England?'

'That's what I thought,' Donna said, her voice muted, obliging Edie to lean in. 'Except that I was out for dinner with an old school friend in Camden Town a few days later in a restaurant called Gilgamesh, which is very large, and when I went to the washroom between courses I saw her again. Over the other side of the room.'

'You saw Rachel in the restaurant?'

'Yes. From a distance, I was pretty sure it was the same woman as in Covent Garden, so I weaved over between the tables, keeping plenty of space between us. Closer up, I got a good look and it *was* Rachel. No question. She was with another woman I didn't recognise.'

'That is strange,' Edie commented. 'Did you talk to her?'

'No! No way. It ended so awfully at university … and I'm not even sure if she knew that I married Scott.'

'Okay,' Edie said, puzzled. 'What did you do?'

'Nothing. I kept an eye on her, finished my meal and then came home.'

There was a short silence as Edie processed the information, before asking: 'And what is it you want me to do?'

'Wait a moment, I haven't finished yet,' replied Donna. 'You're gonna find this hard to believe. A few days later – last Monday – I was on a lunch break from work in Vauxhall and was about to go into the Pret across the street from my office, when I saw Rachel sitting in the window, reading a book.'

'What? Again?' Edie sat bolt upright on the sofa. 'Did she see you this time?'

'No, definitely not. She was lost in whatever she was reading and didn't look up, so I just walked on.'

Edie made a note of the days and locations, then posed the most obvious question: 'Do you think Rachel is following you?'

'No,' came the instant retort. 'In my work … in field training … we're taught to look out for that sort of thing, but Rachel was completely oblivious … totally unaware that I was around. But there's one more thing …'

'You haven't seen her again, have you?'

'Yes! Well, I think so … I mean … I've been getting a bit spooked, so I'm not 100 per cent sure. But yesterday – I try to work from home on Fridays – I went into the Post Office …'

'Sorry, where was this?' Edie interrupted, scribbling in her notebook.

'Here – around the corner in Crouch End!'

Edie noticed that her neighbour's hands were trembling slightly. Clearly agitated, Donna took a deep breath and continued.

'I went in to buy some stamps … just some stamps. It wasn't planned. I happened to be passing the Post Office and remembered we'd run out. I was at the back of a long queue when I saw a woman at the counter who … from behind … I mean, I couldn't see exactly … but from behind looked just like Rachel.'

'And she didn't see you, I'm guessing?' Edie added mischievously, getting used to the run of things.

'No, but this time I followed her … from quite a distance … as I didn't want her to see me. Rachel – or the person who looked like Rachel – walked towards the Clock Tower, went left up the high street, then left again onto Crouch Hill. I was quite far back, at least 100 metres, but I'm fairly sure the woman made a right – once over the brow of the hill – and into that funny place, the Alba Hotel.'

'The Alba Hotel?' repeated Edie. 'Just around the corner from here?'

'Yes. That seems to be where she's staying.' Donna paused then finished abruptly: 'And that's it. That's my whole, rather odd, story.'

From Donna's glazed eyes Edie could tell she was unsettled by what had happened, but Edie still didn't know what the point was. 'That's a really strange story, Mrs … I mean, Donna. But what is it you want my help with?'

'I'd like to hire you, Edie,' Donna proposed quickly, glancing at her watch. 'As a sort of private detective. It's just

too strange that Rachel and I would be in the same place, at the same time, four times over the last two weeks. I want to know what's going on, whether Rachel *is* actually tracking me down. I want an explanation.'

Edie tried to stay composed. Somebody, and somebody serious at that, wanted Edie to do some proper investigative work – something she could get her teeth into. The prospect was exciting.

'You want to hire me,' Edie summarised, 'to find out why your old friend, Rachel, has appeared – or reappeared – in your life four times in the last two weeks. Is that correct?'

'Yes, that's essentially it.'

'But why don't you tell the police what's happened? Let them look into it?'

'I can't. There's been no crime, so there's nothing to report. And it would sound so silly because what I've just told you doesn't make any sense. And I can't do the investigation myself because … well, first, I haven't got the time and, second, if I got caught doing something like that, it wouldn't go down well at work.'

Loud footsteps indicated an adult descending the stairs. Donna concluded the conversation in a whisper: 'I'll give you £100 now for … well, expenses … if you need to buy anything, go anywhere, that sort of thing, and another £100 if you solve my problem.' Donna glanced secretively towards the hallway where her clearly oblivious husband was putting on his coat.

She held out her hand. 'Will you do it?'

Edie looked down. A small envelope was being presented furtively to her. The question, though, was hardly

worth asking. She reached out and accepted the envelope, then shook her neighbour's hand and answered: 'I will.'

One evening Edie is babysitting for a neighbour who has repeatedly caught sight of an estranged friend from overseas.

Where do you think your feelings are coming from?

the inner knowledge that keeps us well

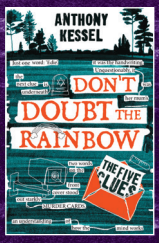
What is troubling is that it seems she's been in the same place at the same time as this friend on a number of occasions over the past few days.

Meanwhile, Edie's school friend is suspicious of his stepfather, who has become involved with ultra-radical anti-capitalists who, furious at the state of the planet and its greed-fuelled decline, are plotting an audacious double atrocity. Utilising her brave instincts and skills as a supersleuth for hire, Edie sets about resolving the mysteries and averting disaster

Edie circled the four topics of most significance: 'anxiety', 'stress', 'conflict', and 'worries about the past'.

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