The Glimpse

Claire wrote her first paranormal screenplay at the age of thirteen and named it after a road sign. *Danger Alive* never made it to the big screen, but she continued to write and daydream her way through school and university. Claire graduated with a first BA (Hons) in Film Studies, and spent the next few years working in the BFI. She worked as a runner and camera assistant, and fantasised about creating her own films. In 2000, she wrote and directed the short film, *Colours*, which sold to Canal Plus. Today, Claire is concentrating on writing YA fiction. She spends her time between Paris and London, along with her French husband and two young sons.

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For my husband, Claude, who always knew.

Prologue

Sometimes, when Ana hovered on the edge of sleep, she heard the patter of feet along the school corridor; she felt her best friend Tamsin close by – a near, warm presence like the imprint on a bed recently slept in; she saw the Board's saloon car pulling up outside the front of school, a white envelope glowing through one of their leather cases, whispering her name, her disease.

Of course that wasn't really how it happened. A little under three years ago, as Ana stood in home economics, large science goggles propped on the end of her nose to be ironic, she hadn't known they were coming for her. But sometimes, in the twilight between wakefulness and dreams she saw it all. As though part of her were trapped in the past, conscious of the threads that were weaving together, tightening their hold around her to create one shattering moment that would change everything.

1

Sleeper

Mrs Beale checked the temperature of the water in Ana's plastic baby bath. Behind them, Tamsin hunched over her own tub and mimicked their teacher, peering cross-eyed at the thermometer.

'Thirty-seven degrees Celsius,' Mrs Beale muttered. 'Very good.'

Tamsin's lips moved in sync with the teacher's words. Her eyelids fluttered, gazing high over Ana's head, just like Mrs Beale. Ana bit the insides of her cheeks, holding back laughter.

Beneath the sweet scent of warmed milk and baby cream lingered the tang of burnt cake. In another life, the lab had been used for identifying carbon dioxide gas with litmus paper and heating sodium-dipped flame-test wires over Bunsen burners. Now it was employed for warming baby bath water to precisely thirty-seven degrees Celsius, for measuring out bottle formulas, for learning to cook large family meals.

Mrs Beale strode past Ana's bench towards Tamsin. Tamsin dropped her impersonation and gazed up at their home economics teacher with wide eyes. Her dark fringe cut a straight line halfway across her forehead. She was

pushing it more than she normally did. Recently, it seemed to Ana, her best friend wanted to get into trouble.

'Now, girls,' Mrs Beale said. Her high-pitched voice strained to be heard over the general class chatter. 'In an emergency, if you find yourself without a thermometer, you may test the water with your wrist. It should be warm, but not hot. Never put a baby in a hot bath.'

Tamsin's hand shot up.

'What if you've been in an accident,' she said, 'and lost your hands, or been burnt in a fire and have skin grafts? Could you test with your elbow, if you still had one?'

Ana squeezed her lips together and snorted. Her shoulders shook. Tamsin blink-blink-blinked her lashes.

'Your elbow would be fine,' Mrs Beale replied, 'should the situation require it.'

Several other girls on the benches nearby giggled. But not even a hint of a smile reached Tamsin's eyes. She wanted to be an actress. At times like this, Ana knew her best friend was practising, proving to herself she was good enough. But Pure girls didn't act; they didn't become concert pianists, like Ana dreamed of being, either. They were too important for that.

A knock sounded on the classroom door.

'Come in,' Mrs Beale trilled.

A small girl from a couple of years below entered.

'Yes?' the teacher said.

The girl blushed. 'The headmistress is waiting for Ariana Barber.' She curtsied then turned on her heel and darted out.

Ana stared at the life-sized newborn-baby doll lying on

the workbench, waiting for its bath. Head wanted to see her? Head never saw anyone. It was the deputy headmistress who took care of trouble, who handed out detentions and tasks.

'You'd better go,' Mrs Beale said. 'Leave all that.'

Sixteen pairs of eyes followed Ana out of the classroom.

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Head's office lay off the front entrance to the school. Ana's patent leather shoes tapped the parquet floor and echoed down the empty corridor as she approached. The usual projected message shone on the closed door: Do Not Disturb. But beneath it lay a personalised instruction: Enter, Ms Barber. Ana's heart flipped into her throat as she reached out, twisted the handle, and went inside.

Five grown-ups sat around a large meeting table. Three, including Ana's headmistress faced the door; her father sat at one end; the last man had his back to her. Everyone but her father looked up as she entered.

Ana's breath caught in her throat. She rubbed her hands on her blue uniform skirt.

'Please sit down, Ariana,' Head said, gesturing to a chair.

She shuffled towards the table. Her mind fell blank. She flexed her legs to sit, but they gave way. Her bum hit the wooden seat with a slap. The jarring force travelled up her spine and rattled her brains.

'The Board,' Head said, introducing the man and woman beside her.

Ana's eyes flicked up to the ugly pair. Now she

understood her father's stillness. He was scared. The Board didn't visit normal people.

The female in the grey suit stroked the corner of a stiff envelope bearing the Board's gold stripe. Head's eye twitched. The man beside Ana, the Chief Warden from their Community, who was in charge of security, kept glancing at her father. The male Board representative cleared his throat.

'The Board of Psychiatric Testing and Evaluation,' he said, 'was established ten years ago, just after the Pure tests, to help contain our country's Mental Health Crisis and prevent it from spiralling out of control.'

His monotone sent a shiver down Ana's back. He obviously wasn't here to give her a history lesson.

'Science has classified the genetic mutations,' he went on, 'for three hundred and four Mental Illnesses.' His head bobbed, too large for his skinny neck. 'Each mutation is dominant.'

Ana gazed at her fingers in her lap. They didn't just tremble, they convulsed. Like there were tiny animals inside pushing to get out. She glanced at her father. His six-foot-two figure was all angles. His jaw clenched. He finally looked up, blue eyes locking on the male Board representative like he was preparing to take out a target.

'Human traits,' the man continued, 'are determined by variations in the genes. The Big3 – schizophrenia, depression, anxiety – are a complex mutation of these differences that depend on the state of several interacting genes.' The Board representative paused. He met her father's glare, a small smile on his lips. 'What perhaps you may not realise,

Ariana, is that if one parent is affected by the Big3, every child will automatically become a Carrier, at best. More likely than not, however, they will develop some variation of the inherited illness, starting off as a Sleeper and one day becoming Active.'

Ana stifled a gasp. The room seemed to shrink and fold in on itself like an inflatable castle at the end of a children's party. *Please*, *no*, *no*. *This couldn't be happening*.

'So,' the man said. He prodded a piece of paper on the table in front of him. 'Three months ago, you contacted the Guildford Register's Office for a copy of your mother's death certificate.'

A throbbing pulse began in Ana's neck and wrists. She and her father had moved to the Highgate Community when she was eleven, a month after her father had taken her to see a dying woman with yellow skin and no hair, who he claimed was Isabelle Barber. Ana had always been sure he was lying. The patient with the boiled-egg head and dark craters instead of cheeks didn't share Ana and her mum's grey eyes, nor did she have a mole beneath her lip like Ana's mum. Besides, Ana had seen her mum dead nine months earlier. Did her father think she'd forgotten?

Now, as she sat facing the Board, all she wanted was to take back ordering a copy of her mother's death certificate. She never thought proving she was right about her mum's death would feel so wrong. Because finally she understood. Her father's lies had been protecting her. She should have been raised in the City with all the other Crazies.

I'm not Pure.

Ana's bottom lip began to quiver. Tears blurred her

vision. Life in Crazy-land was a terror-filled battle for survival. You could get stabbed walking down the street, attacked in a supermarket, robbed for your hair, or thrown, possibly by yourself, off a bridge.

The male Board member turned over the paper before him with a flick of his wrist. He pretended to read the autopsy conclusion, but he obviously knew it by heart.

'Death by car-exhaust asphyxiation.' He looked up at Ana. 'Once a popular method of suicide, if that was what you were wondering.' He slid the certificate across the desk towards her.

The blood in Ana's body dived towards her feet, as though attempting to abandon ship. She bent forward, put her spinning head between her legs.

'The Board delivers death certificates now?' she heard her father say, his voice so hollow she barely recognised it.

'This is a rather special case,' the man replied. 'You, Dr Barber, are something of a household name in more educated circles.'

Nobody seemed to notice Ana half under the table, or if they did, they'd decided not to interrupt.

'The secretary at the Guildford Register's Office had read about your wife's battle with cancer,' the male Board member continued. 'As you might imagine, this certificate created something of a conundrum. Worth a little investigation. Once the secretary had verified that the Isabelle Barber of this certificate was indeed the same Isabelle Barber as your wife, she discovered that your daughter is registered as a Pure and alerted us. The big question, of course, is how could the daughter of a depressive possibly

be Pure? It's impossible. Except . . . except that you, Dr Barber, are in the unusual position of having developed the DNA tests for the Big3.'

And therefore are capable of altering the results, Ana thought. Everyone else was thinking it too. The Board's insinuation left no space for anything else. Her father had covered up her mother's suicide and then faked Ana's Pure test.

A moan escaped her, low and whimpering like a trapped animal's swan song.

Oh God, what about Jasper? She and Jasper were due to be bound next month, the first steps two Pures took to becoming joined. Ana struggled to inhale, but she couldn't get any air.

'You can't possibly think that these accusations will stick,' her father said.

'We have already redone your daughter's test, Dr Barber.' A wooden chair creaked as the man leaned back. Beneath the table, Ana saw him press his fingers together in the shape of a steeple.

'The interface virus?' she croaked. Last week, several students had been sent to the school nurse after the deputy head announced that an interface virus had wiped a few student medical records. Tamsin had joked that the deputy was running a small business on the side selling Pure DNA for cloning.

The Board rose from their chairs with synchronised movements. A large white envelope lay on the desk before them, its gold stripe glinting in the morning sunlight. Ana's redone test results lay inside it.

She couldn't move, not even to straighten up.

Instead of living happily ever after with Jasper, she would be battling to survive the giant loony bin of the City, waiting for the day she would wake up and decide to kill herself.

The Chief Warden coughed. 'Sorry, Ashby, a couple of the boys are waiting for us outside. I'm going to have to take you in.'

Through spread fingers, Ana watched her father push to his feet. The Chief Warden locked metal cuffs around his wrists.

Ashby looked livid. 'I hardly think this is necessary,' he said. He crossed in front of the window towards Ana. A large, shackled hand pressed into her back. 'I'll be out on bail in a couple of hours,' he said.

The tears rolling down Ana's cheeks dried. Numbness spread through her. She had no idea how bad things would get from here on. But she did know that she would never let her father touch her again.