

The police didn't have anything. It made me laugh. It made me laugh so much that night in front of my laptop in the cheap hotel room that I helped myself to Bane's bottle of whisky. My throat burning, I stared at the image of a bat-eared fox on my computer screen; the nocturnal bat-eared fox.

I didn't know how a bat-eared fox could be the reason that three people had vanished into thin air but I had learned early in this job to always listen to my instincts and my gut was screaming at me. Of course, that might have been the whisky. Feeling a little giddy as Bane's whisky burned its way through me, I did a quick search on the myths of foxes and the bat-eared fox. Not a lot came up. My eyes glanced upon a few pages about Japanese foxes and I clicked on them. I placed Bane's bottle down and leaned forward, reading eagerly. There it was, in black and white. Well, blue and white on a very nicely designed amateur webpage. I didn't know if I could trust it, but it was all I had. I took another swig of whisky, smacked my lips and closed my laptop. Pulling on my shoes and leather shoulder holster, I grabbed my dark hoody and car keys and made my way out of the hotel and down to the car park.

There were some lights on in the zoo. It hadn't occurred to me that there would be some sort of night shift and I stared at the dim lights from my car, parked outside the entrance, engine still running. I moved the car round the corner and managed to park into a tight space. Opening the boot, I pulled out my revolver and hesitated. Bane had given me this gun as a birthday present. I stroked the warm metal fondly. He must have bought it in England, otherwise I don't know how he would have got it into the country. It certainly didn't come with a licence. Bane had wrapped up the box it came in and gave it to me along with a dozen roses and a small cake wrapped in sugary icing. I had not been able to let go of the gun since. Even in my attempts of a normal life, the gun lived close to me, wrapped up tight, often in the boot of my car. I slipped the gun into my holster under my hoody, slammed the boot shut and locked the car. Pulling my hood over my head and eyes, I shoved my hands into my pockets and skulked back to the entrance of the zoo. I needed to find a way in.

The main entrance was surrounded by light from the street and felt too overlooked despite being opposite the Downs. I followed the path adjacent to the car park until I was shielded by trees. Glancing up at the wall towering above me, I sighed. How was I going to do this?

'Emily?'

I jumped. Not just a jolt, but an agonising leap. My insides turned to liquid and ached, I spun to meet my attacker. Ray stood behind me, a baseball cap pulled over his shaggy hair.

'Oh, Ray. Hi,' I tried to sound normal, as if I always came this way in the middle of the night, but I suddenly felt front heavy as the weight of my revolver dragged me forward.

'Hi.'

We stared at each other awkwardly and it dawned on me that he might be there for the same reason.

'Just passing?' I gave him a sideways look.

'Yes. And you?'

I shrugged.

'I was just having a look around.'

'You think they might come back? Just like that?' I opened and closed my mouth, turning and staring up at the wall. 'You came to break in, didn't you?'

'Well, maybe.'

'I knew you knew something. What do you know?'

I gave Ray a small smile.

'You'll think I'm mad.'

'Really? As mad as my sister just vanishing into thin air? Come on, try me.'

'Ok. What if they didn't vanish. What if they're still there, or here.'

'Go on.'

'Just not right now.'

'You've lost me.'

'In Japanese mythology there's a fox that can shapeshift into other creatures including people, usually beautiful women. They would be like ordinary women, fall in love, have children, all that. But they could also bend time and space.'

'Of course. And?'

'And I know that the zoo has recently obtained a bat-eared fox.'

'Yeah, it's in the nocturnal house. They must have had it a while, quarantine and all that. So what?'

'So? Bat-eared fox? The Japanese fox?'

'Bat-eared foxes aren't from Japan.'

I exhaled heavily and put my hands on my hips.

'Well what do you think it is then?'

'I don't know, maybe it's a ghost?'

'No, this isn't a ghost,' I said a little too seriously. Ray did a double take at me, narrowing his eyes.

'Just who are you? Really? I don't really think the nocturnal house is haunted but it sounds like you've seriously considered it.'

I stared at Ray for a moment. Could I tell him? How could I tell him? I didn't know what he would do.

'Never mind,' I waved the conversation away and turned back in the direction of my car.

'You miss him a lot, huh?' Ray began walking beside me. I gave him a crumpled smile.

'Yeah. How's your nephew?'

'He's alright. You two were close friends?'

'He's my ex. We were about to get back together. I think. Maybe.'

'Sounds complicated.'

'Yeah, only because I made it so complicated,' I pulled a face.

'Sounds like you love him,' Ray said, as if that would answer all my questions.

'I never said I didn't,' I said quietly, leaving Ray behind to drive home in silence. I stupidly hadn't thought of quarantine. I needed to stop for a moment, take a breath and revisit the zoo in the daylight.