

**KNOW  
ME  
NOW**

**CJ CARVER**

ZAFFRE

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## CHAPTER ONE

Connor Baird couldn't believe it. He was lost.

Trying not to panic, he quickly dropped into the mist towards where he thought the main track into town should be. The rain increased. Torrential. And it wasn't mist, he realised. He was in cloud. Dodging a small rock fall, he tried to keep his sense of direction but it was almost impossible when all the rivers and mountainsides looked the same.

He pushed on.

As he rounded a corner, he expected to see the old shepherd's bothy dead ahead, which would show that he was barely a mile from Duncaid, but all he saw instead was a rock face.

He slid to a stop and at the same time, the cloud parted.

Below was a seemingly endless monochrome carpet of peat and waterlogged moorland. Nothing was familiar. He could have been on the other side of the Cairngorms for all he knew.

Shit, shit, *shit*.

Should he keep going, or retrace his tracks?

He dithered briefly before he decided to keep going downhill. How could he have been so stupid? Talk about teaching him a lesson: never storm off in a temper. He'd spent a great day at his

grandpa's, but then his mother had ruined everything by asking him to babysit tonight. For the third time in a week! Hadn't she got the message yet? He was sick of the baby, the way everyone made stupid goo-goo noises at it, grinning like idiots. It was just a baby for Chrissakes, but when his little brother had taken his first steps last week you'd think he'd walked across the English Channel unassisted. And when little Dougie threw Connor's mobile phone on to the flagstone floor, smashing its screen into a thousand pieces, it wasn't the baby's fault. It was Connor's, for leaving the phone within the baby's reach. He was still without a phone a week later.

Connor wound down a snaking track, the tips of heather blurring into his peripheral vision. Why should his mum go out again and leave him alone with the baby? Why couldn't she get a proper babysitter? And what about his dad? Why couldn't he help out? Just because he'd had an affair shouldn't mean he could wriggle out of his parental responsibility. He was the sodding father after all.

Connor pedalled faster, squinting through the rain. He'd been out for hours now and he was hungry. He was fantasising about what he'd eat from the fridge when he got home, when a building loomed through the fog, its stone walls slick with rain. As he got closer his spirits lifted when he saw a long industrial-style building with a couple of cars parked outside. It looked like he'd come to the back of the Blackwater Industrial Estate. How on earth had that happened? He supposed it made a weird kind of sense he'd done a zigzag loop around the back of town but he wasn't sure

how he'd done it, and if he was asked to do it again he wouldn't have a clue where to start.

Propping his bike against the wall, he went and knocked on the door. He wanted a hot drink, to dry off for a bit and maybe hitch a ride home. He knocked again, louder. Nothing. He waited a while, shifting from foot to foot. It may be September but it couldn't be called warm, not with the rain.

He tried the door, but it was locked.

Frustrated, he walked to the next building and had a look around. He glanced up at the security cameras. Was anyone watching him? He'd never seen anybody here. It was probably derelict inside and the cameras defunct.

When he saw one of the windows had a chink in its blind, right at the bottom, he bent to have a look. He saw a tiled floor and white-washed walls. The room seemed empty, except—

*What the . . .?*

He reared backwards, blinking rapidly. His brain seemed to have stalled. He stayed where he was for a moment. He was trembling, but whether it was with fear or from the cold, he didn't know.

He bent down to have another look. He needed to be sure. But he hadn't imagined anything.

At the far end of the room was a girl.

She was lying on a table.

She was naked.

She had short-cropped curly dark red hair and her skin held a weird green tinge and looked wet and waxy.

She had three soaring ravens tattooed on her wrist and although he was too far away to read the words beneath, he knew what they were.

*Let it be.*

She'd had more ravens tattooed on her back, spiralling out of a tree that covered the whole of her left shoulder blade and curled its delicate branches up her spine and along her neck. The accompanying text, in a dainty Brush script, read:

*The worst thing is  
holding on to someone  
who doesn't want to be  
held on to.*

Connor's heart began pounding so hard he wondered how it didn't leap from his chest.

Nimue Acheson.

She'd been named after the 'Lady of the Lake', or at least that's what she'd said. Teachers thought she was fantastic: great grades, always neatly dressed, helpful and polite. But then she'd been dumped by her boyfriend, Rickie Finley, and things changed. She'd become depressed and struggled with school work. When she started talking about suicide, her family sent her to a shrink. But she still killed herself. Jumped to her death from Collynie Bridge and onto the rocks below.

Connor had been at her funeral two weeks ago along with the rest of the school. He'd seen her coffin, covered with pink and white hearts made out of miniature roses. He'd watched

her being buried. Heard her dad saying he was going to get a beautiful headstone made out of marble for her and have a raven carved into its top. That he'd plant bluebells and snowdrops around her grave to welcome her each year into spring, her favourite time of year.

Connor moaned.

What was Nimue doing here?

Why wasn't she in her grave?

The moan began to rise into a shout of horror from the back of his throat.

At that moment he heard something behind him. He spun round and jumped in shock. The man was *so close!*

'I just . . . I mean . . .'

 Connor stammered. He held his hands high. 'I'm s-sorry . . .' He wanted to step back but couldn't. Not with his back thrust against the window.

The man moved so fast Connor didn't have time to react. One second he was standing there, both hands behind his back, the next he'd rammed something sharp into Connor's thigh.

'Hey!' Connor scrambled aside, yelping with pain.

The man watched him without expression.

Connor looked down to see a syringe hanging from his jeans. 'What the . . .'

 He pulled it free. Held it up. The hypodermic needle dripped blood. Then he took in the fact that the plunger had been pushed almost to the end of the barrel and that any liquid that had been inside was now inside *him*.

'Shit.' He looked at the man. 'What's in it? What the fuck . . .'

The man didn't move. Didn't blink.

A thought formed in Connor's head: *I have to get out of here.*

He started to move for his bike but he'd barely gone a few paces when his legs collapsed. He fell to the ground, gravel scraping his face.

*No, no, no!*

He tried to get up, but his limbs wouldn't move. He tried to shout but his mouth wouldn't work. Terror flooded him.

He was paralysed.

He heard the man's footsteps coming towards him. Connor desperately tried to open his mouth to scream as a dark wave enveloped him.

No breath.

No feeling.

No thought.

Nothing.

## CHAPTER TWO

Grace Reavey was pulling wallpaper off the wall, great chunks of damp plaster coming with it, when her phone rang. Pushing her hair back with her wrist, she grabbed it off the windowsill.

It was still light, sunset another three hours away. One more hour of daylight than she was used to in England, which was great, but what about the winter months? She was already dreading the notoriously short and dark days, but she hadn't said anything to Ross. If she went stir crazy for sunshine, she'd get a sunlamp.

'Dr Reavey,' she answered her phone.

'Oh, Doctor,' a woman said. 'I'm so sorry . . .' She started to sob.

Grace made a murmuring, soothing noise, and waited.

'I don't know . . . I'm so sorry . . .' The woman was forcing her words out. 'I'm trying to see . . . but I don't know if he's dead or not. He's jumped, you see. Just like that girl . . .'

Alarm filled Grace.

'Dead?' she said.

'I don't know.' It was a wail. 'I don't know what to do!'

Grace gripped the receiver. 'Dial 999 immediately. But first, what's your name?'

'Mary Gibson.'

'Mary, can you tell me where you are?'

'I'm on the Collynie Bridge. I was walking Billy home, you see. Wanting to get back for our tea.'

'That's on the other side of Duncaid, am I right? On the road to Knockstanton?'

'Aye. That's the one.'

'I'm on my way.' She was already moving across the room as she spoke. 'But call 999 *now*, OK? They'll send an ambulance straightaway.'

'Aye, OK.'

After frantically scrubbing her hands clean, Grace pulled on a fleece, grabbed her doctor's bag and raced to her car. Flinging her bag on the passenger's seat she started her Golf in such a hurry she nearly stalled. *Steady*, she told herself. *You'll get there just as fast if you're not in a panic.*

Grace tore down the drive, stones spitting from her tyres. She couldn't see Ross. He was probably in one of the cottages, clearing it of debris. She rumbled over the cattle grid. Turned right on to the road to Duncaid. As she drove, she called the emergency services who confirmed they'd heard from Mary Gibson. They'd sent a blue light.

Although Collynie Bridge wasn't far from Duncaid, it always took longer than you expected because of the narrowness of the road and the countless hairpin bends. Luckily, she only met one tractor en-route, which she overtook easily, and made it to the

other side of town in under twenty minutes and well before the ambulance, which had to come all the way from Elgin.

Grace parked her car on the narrow verge and jumped out. She could hear the roar of the water and smell the peaty spray from the river before she stepped on to the cast-iron bridge. Mary Gibson rushed to greet her, grey hair askew beneath her waterproof hood, expression distraught. A damp looking West Highland terrier tagged alongside. Billy, Grace assumed.

‘I cannae get down there,’ Mary gasped. ‘I’m too bloody old.’

Grace looked past the floral tributes to Nimue Acheson, who’d jumped here just three weeks ago. A mountain bike was propped next to them. *Please God, let there not be an epidemic of copycat suicides.* Heart in her mouth, she peered into the ravine.

Straightaway she knew he was dead from the catastrophic angle between his head and neck, but she still had to check. She scrambled down the bank, grabbing handfuls of heather and grass to stop her falling. The bridge was single span, two car lengths at the most, but the drop had to be at least a hundred feet. A waterfall thundered past, dampening her face and hair. She passed the spot where Nimue’s body had been found, marked by several strings of police tape strapped around some rocks. As the bank steepened, she braced herself, sliding her way down, and by the time she reached the bottom her hands and clothes were covered in mud.

Carefully, Grace crabbed her way over some boulders to the edge of the river and quickly washed her hands before squatting beside the body. He’d not only broken his neck, but both legs were also broken along with his right arm. Without any hope

she tried his pulse. Pressed her fingers against his carotid artery. Zero. He'd died not long ago as the skin was still in early rigor mortis. Less than six hours, she guessed.

She gently pushed the hair back from his face.

Her heart clenched.

'Ah, no.'