Alice Anderson is exactly where Deborah said she would be, on the cliff in Saltdean looking out at the sea. Not that I could have missed her in that hot-pink fur coat she’s wearing. It’s the sort of thing I’d make a beeline for in a shop, but never be brave enough to buy. I’d try it on, take a selfie, then put it back in favour of something more sensible. Something black that I could wear to school without getting detention.

That’s one of the hardest things about this, how hopelessly normal they are. Alice could be from my year or the girl behind me in the queue at Primark, waiting for the changing rooms. Someone I could have passed in the street and never noticed until tonight.

It’s hard to tell in the dark, but from here she looks my age – sixteen, maybe seventeen – with a froth of blonde curls that the wind lifts up and away from her face so I can see her profile. I can’t see the colour of her eyes, but I can make out the sweep of her jaw and her neat button nose, her lipstick the same colour as her coat.

Judging by her knee-length dress and heels, she’s been out tonight. It’s far too cold for bare legs, but maybe she thought she’d be OK because she was getting a cab home, then lost her purse and had to walk instead. Or maybe she had a row with
her boyfriend and told him to stop the car here, insisting that
she’d make her own way home.

I don’t know why I do this, why I make up stories about
them. That will pass, I suppose. Maybe in a few months when
I’ve done this enough times that I won’t even remember their
names any more.

Until then, I can’t help but ask myself why they’re there.

Why them?

The sea is rough tonight, the waves a rolling boil that will
snatch you clean off your feet and drag you in if you get too
close. Not that I ever do. I’ve always been scared of open
water and nights like this remind me why. The waves are
so loud that Alice doesn’t hear me approach, but I keep my
distance because I can see that she’s shaking.

There’s something about that moment, when you’re stuck
in that woozy midpoint between being here and not, when
you feel everything at once – fear, joy, hope. It’s not so much
a rush as a flood and it’s like you’re drowning, like someone
is holding your head under water and if you can just find your
way back to the surface, you’ll be OK.

That’s what’s so cruel about it. There’s a split second when
you’re sure that you got away with it and the relief is dizzying.
It’s kind of like that moment right after you kiss someone
for the first time and you feel untethered, like you could float
up and touch the sky. That’s where I come in, to make sure
you don’t.

I give Alice a minute to steady herself, watch as she closes
her eyes and sucks in a breath. Her whole body shudders and I
wonder if it’s then that she knows that there’s nothing there.
Finally, Alice turns, her blonde curls swirling in the wind, and when she sees me, she takes a step back.

I wait a beat, then another.

‘Alice Anderson?’

The crease between her fair eyebrows deepens. ‘How do you know my name?’

‘I’m Ash.’

She stares at me so I nod at her. It takes her a moment, but when she realises that I’m gesturing at her to look over the cliff, she does, then lets out a wail that sends the seagulls scattering in every direction. She staggers back from the edge and covers her mouth with both hands. When she spins round to face me again, I have to fight the urge to turn and run because what if she wants me to say something?

This is what she’ll want me to say: everything is going to be OK.

This is what I can’t say: everything is going to be OK.

She doesn’t say anything, though, and I’m glad that she doesn’t ask me how or why or any of those impossible questions I can’t answer. Maybe she’ll want to know when. I can tell her that. If there’s one thing I’ve learnt doing this, it’s that in that moment, when all the years you thought you had ahead of you dissolve into a few seconds, why doesn’t matter. What matters is who you’ll leave behind and I get that more than anyone, believe me.

Like I said, there’s something about that moment. Everything – all those things you did and didn’t do and said and didn’t say – falls away and you see everything with absolute, startling clarity. People go their whole lives waiting for that moment.
They climb mountains and swim seas and read books hoping to find it. A lucky few do, but most of us – people like me and Alice Anderson and all the ones who went before us and all the ones that will follow – don’t until it’s too late and, God, it’s cruel, isn’t it? How, when there’s no time left, you suddenly know exactly what you should have done with it.

When Alice lifts her chin to look me in the eye for the first time since she found me standing here, I wait and wonder if this is it. She knows and it will come out in a rush. All the things she should have done. The lies she told and secrets she kept. She can’t take it with her, so she’ll leave it with me. Everything she wished for when she blew out her birthday candles. I’m there and this is it, her last chance to say I’m sorry or I love you or Forgive me.

All the times she should have jumped and didn’t. All the people she should have kissed and didn’t. All that time she wasted being too careful or too polite or too scared when, in the end, nothing is as scary as watching your whole life narrow to a single moment that’s about to pass, whether you’re ready for it to or not.

Maybe I’ll see it then – the regret – burning off her, right through her clothes, and she’ll never look so alive. She’ll laugh and cry and scream, exhaust every emotion until there’s nothing left and it will be like watching a light bulb flare then burn out.

Alice doesn’t do any of that, though. She doesn’t tell me her secrets, doesn’t tell me about her dog, Chester, who sleeps at the bottom of her bed at night. Or about the lipstick she stole from Boots last year, the red one that wouldn’t come off, even when she scrubbed it so hard her mouth felt bruised for days.
I should be OK with that because it means that I don’t need to explain, we can just go. But I want to. I want Alice to ask me who I am. If she did, I’d tell her that I’m Ashana Persaud and that I’m sixteen. I’d tell her that my favourite song is ‘Rock Steady’ because it always gets my parents on the dance floor at weddings and my favourite film is *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, even though I tell everyone it’s *The Shining* because it’s easier. I’d show her the scar on my chin that I got falling off a slide when I was six and tell her about the tattoo I was going to get on my eighteenth birthday. I’d tell her that I’m scared of open water and clowns and being puked on and that from here, you can see where I had my last kiss, a couple of weeks ago, right there on the beach. And most of all, I’d tell her that it’s not fair.

It’s not fair that she gets to go, when I have to stay here and do this.

She doesn’t ask, though, so we just stand there, on the edge of the cliff, the moon watching over us and the sea beckoning beneath until finally she says, ‘The moon looked so pretty. I just wanted to take a photo of it. I didn’t realise I was so close to the edge and then it just . . .’ she stops to look up at the moon, ‘. . . wasn’t there any more.’

When I see her smudged eyeliner, a mascara-coloured tear skidding down her cheek, I realise that her eyes are brown, like mine, but the light behind them has gone and I wonder what they were like before. Before I got here. And I wonder who’s waiting for her at home. If her parents are up, pretending to be engrossed in *Newsnight* so it doesn’t look like they’ve been waiting up for her. Her mother swaddled in a thick dressing gown, phone in hand, while her father listens out for the
curmudgeonly creak of the gate, followed by Alice’s careful footsteps as she navigates the gravel path in her heels.

But she isn’t going home, is she? The thought makes me want to turn and run into the sea, let it pull me under, carry me to wherever it is that I’m supposed to be. But I can’t. I can’t leave her. So I walk over to where she’s standing and peer over the edge. It’s dark, but I can see her – Alice Anderson – on the path, her limbs at unnaturally odd angles on the concrete, a halo of fresh blood beneath her head.

We stand there for a while, my hands in the pockets of my jacket and Alice’s in the pockets of her hot-pink coat. Eventually, she tilts her cheek towards me. ‘Are you an angel?’ I try not to laugh. ‘If you’re not an angel, what are you, then?’ She looks me up and down and I let her. Let her take in that I’m in black, from my DMs and jeans to my hoodie and leather jacket. Her gaze narrows when she sees my silver scythe necklace.

With that, her pale skin becomes almost see-through against the dark sky, her edges blurred, like she’s already disappearing. A whisper of moths gathers, settling in her curls as she watches me look over the cliff again then does the same. When she sees the sharp shadow of Charon on the beach below, the moonlight picking out his wooden boat as it bobs gently on the suddenly still sea, she turns to me with a curious frown.

‘Is he here for me?’
I nod.
‘Where am I going?’
I hold out my hand. ‘You’ll see.’
ONE

As school trips go, visiting a wind farm to learn about the importance of renewable energy isn’t much to get excited about. We don’t even get to go on a coach because we’re only going to the Marina so Mr Moreno makes us walk there, saying that the exercise will do us good.

It’s chaos, of course, all of us spilling out of the school gates at once in a roar of laughter and chatter that you must be able to hear halfway down the street. We Whitehawk kids have a bad enough reputation as it is, but when we’re travelling en masse like this, it’s enough to make people shake their heads and tut as they cross the road to avoid us.

By the time we get on to Manor Hill, Mr Moreno is clearly regretting his decision to make us walk as he runs back and forth, frantically doing a head count to make sure none of us have wandered off while his TA urges those of us lagging behind to hurry up or we’ll miss the boat.

I’m one of them.

‘It won’t be that bad,’ Adara tells me, offering me a cheese and onion crisp, which I refuse with a surly scowl as I stuff my hands into the pockets of my leather jacket. She’s right, of course. After all, it’s quite a hot afternoon for late September, the sun high and bright in the sky, and I’m missing double
chemistry, which is never a bad thing. Besides, it’s Friday and Mr Moreno says that we’ll be done by two thirty, so I should be thrilled that we’re finishing early, even if it means hanging out at a wind farm for a few hours.

My reluctance, however, is less to do with where we’re going, rather, how we’re getting there.

‘Listen, yeah,’ Adara says, stopping to reach for another crisp and pointing it at me. ‘I know you don’t like open water, babe, but it’ll be fine. I promise. We’ll sail to the wind farm, look at the turbines, marvel in the energy of the future and sail back.’ I obviously don’t look convinced because she adds, ‘What’s the worst that can happen?’

That question is answered as soon as we arrive at the Marina and Dan McCarthy runs up behind me. He must have overheard us talking because he picks me up and threatens to throw me into the sea. I shriek, telling him to let go of me as I try to kick him, but he just laughs and asks me if I want to go for a swim. I’m aware of Adara shouting at him, but that just makes him laugh harder as he holds me over the sea wall, the waves so close it’s as though they’re reaching up to lick the soles of my DMs.

Mercifully, Mr Moreno intervenes, marching over to where he has me dangling. ‘Daniel McCarthy! Put Ashana down right now!’ Mr Moreno never raises his voice, which I almost admire, given that he has to keep a classful of sixteen year olds engaged through double chemistry on a Friday afternoon when our only concern is what we’re doing at the weekend. It works, though, because Dan lifts me back over the edge of the sea wall and puts me down.
Mr Moreno’s cheeks go from pink to red. ‘What were you doing, Daniel?’

‘We were just mucking around, Sir.’

_We?_ I’m tempted to interject, but Year Eleven solidarity dictates that I never grass on a fellow classmate, even if they’re as annoying as Dan.

‘It didn’t seem like Ashana was in on the joke, though.’ Mr Moreno crosses his arms, waiting for me to agree. When I don’t, he gives up with a sharp sigh. ‘Apologise to Ashana. _Now._’

‘Sorry,’ he says, trying to swallow back a laugh and failing.

Mr Moreno, clearly unimpressed with Dan’s lack of remorse, uncrosses his arms to raise his finger. ‘We’ll discuss this on Monday, Daniel. I want to see you in my office at eight o’clock, do you understand?’ I can tell Dan wants to object – eight o’clock on a Monday morning! – but he thinks better of it and nods instead. ‘Now try to behave yourself for the rest of the afternoon. Do you think you can manage that?’

Dan grunts something I assume is yes then runs off to join his mates.

‘Prick,’ I mutter, adjusting my leather jacket. I didn’t think I’d said it loud enough for Mr Moreno to hear, but he turns to me with a fierce frown that lets me know that he doesn’t think it’s a proportional response. Now it’s my turn to apologise, which is deeply unfair given that I nearly just died. I mutter one anyway, which he acknowledges with a nod before ushering my classmates who gathered to see what’s going on towards the gangway that leads to the boat.

‘You OK?’ Adara asks as we follow, albeit with less enthusiasm.
I nod and she knows me well enough to leave it at that.

My legs are still shaking as we walk over to where everyone is gathered in a horseshoe around Mr Moreno at the foot of the gangway, his face back to its normal colour. He must have been waiting for us, because when Adara and I stop, lingering at the back, he holds his hands up. ‘I know we’re all excited to learn about the marvel of renewable energy.’ There’s a collective groan, which he ignores. ‘But you’re representing Whitehawk High School this afternoon, so please try to remember that, OK?’

He tilts his head and raises his eyebrows at Dan McCarthy, who looks back at me and laughs.

‘Ignore him,’ Adara tells me as Mr Moreno claps his hands and turns to lead the way up the narrow gangway towards the waiting boat. ‘You know what Dan’s like.’

‘He’s kind of hard to ignore when he’s trying to throw me in the sea, Ad.’

‘I know, but he only does this stuff because he fancies you. You know what boys are like. That’s how they show their affection.’

‘He’s not my type,’ I remind her with a sour smile.

She laughs. ‘He doesn’t know that, though, does he?’

‘First of all.’ I stop to smooth the palms of my hands over my scalp, trying to tame the fine hair that has escaped from my ponytail thanks to Dan’s grand romantic gesture. ‘He doesn’t fancy me, he’s an asshole. And even if he did, we’re sixteen, Ad. Aren’t we beyond boys pulling our pigtails in the playground?’

She goes quiet and when the skin between her precisely
drawn eyebrows pinches, I know that she’s asking herself whether all the boys who teased us over the years, who tried to pull off her hijab and told us that we smelt like curry, were just ‘showing their affection’ or if they were assholes, like Dan.

I’m about to tell her not to worry about it when there’s a bristle of excitement. I wonder what Dan’s done now as Mr Moreno marches down the gangway towards us, reminding Adara and I that they’re holding up the boat because we’re late as he corrals us on. It’s then that we discover what all the excitement is about: we’re not alone. There, on the other side of the deck, is a huddle of girls who look as horrified to see us as we are to see them.

‘Who are they?’ Adara asks, blinking so furiously the wings of her eyeliner look set to take flight.

‘The Whitehawk kids and the Roedean girls.’ I smirk. ‘This should be interesting.’

There’s a tense moment of silence as we stare across the deck at one another. To their credit, they don’t recoil, rather push their shoulders back and lift their chins as if to say, We’re not scared of you. Some even cross their arms and while it does nothing to deflect the stares they’re getting, when I see them in their neat navy uniforms, it’s enough to make me want to lick my thumb and bend down to wipe away the scuff on the toe of my DM.

When I turn back to Adara, she’s fussing over her hijab and I follow her gaze across the deck to a girl with the sort of hair I’ve only ever seen in shampoo adverts – long and blonde and practically glowing in the late September sun – who is staring shamelessly at us.
‘What’s the matter?’ I ask her, crossing my arms. ‘Never seen brown people before?’

The girl immediately flushes, then turns to her friend to whisper something. I’m about to tell Adara to ignore her, but I don’t need to as she looks at me and rolls her eyes.

‘Right. Everyone keep to the left, please,’ Mr Moreno tells us as the teacher from Roedean tells them to keep to the right, as though we’re warring football supporters who might charge at one another.

The boat engine starts and as soon as I feel the reluctant rumble of it beneath my feet, I remember where I am and reach for the railing to steady myself as my legs threaten to give way. I’ll give them that – the Roedean girls are a welcome distraction from the sea encircling us, but as the boat begins to pull away from the dock, I’m lashed in the face with the cloying smell of fuel and feel the milk from the cereal my mother made me have before I left home curdling in my stomach.

‘Deep breaths,’ Adara coos, rubbing my back with her hand, but I can’t – the heady smell combined with the smoke chugging from the engine is so strong, I can taste it coating my tongue.

I cover my mouth and nose with my hand, but it doesn’t help. Sit down, but it doesn’t help. Close my eyes, but it doesn’t help. The seagulls aren’t helping, either, hovering uncomfortably close to the boat like vultures circling a fresh kill. Eventually, one breaks away from the others, swooping down to snatch a crisp out of Dan’s hand and carrying it away in its beak. The response is swift, this sudden roar of shrieks and laughs, which makes the seagulls even more hysterical.
as I cling on to the railing, sure that I can feel the boat tipping from side to side as everyone runs back and forth across the deck.

I can hear Mr Moreno and the teacher from Roedean telling everyone to calm down as I tighten my grip on the railing and cover my eyes with my other hand. And I can hear Adara asking if I’m OK and focus on the familiar sound of her voice. I can’t speak, everything blurry and out of reach, the deck no longer solid, more like sloshing water beneath my feet as I try not to give into it and let it pull me under.

I find my voice and ask Adara to give me a minute. I retreat to the other end of the boat to put as much distance between me and the engine as possible. It doesn’t help and just as I realise that I won’t be able to swallow back the wave of nausea rushing up my chest much longer, I remember Mr Moreno telling us before we left that seasickness is your brain struggling to understand why it feels like everything is moving while you’re still. Apparently, if you look at the horizon, your brain notes the movement and resets your internal equilibrium. I’m willing to try anything at this point, so I lift my head and focus on Shoreham Power Station.

I hold on to the railing and wait for my brain to do its thing as I watch the shoreline recede in the distance. Nothing happens, though. I still feel wretched, so I reach into the back pocket of my jeans for my phone, half tempted to call my mother and beg her to come get me when, to my surprise, I realise that it’s working. I feel better. Kind of. I still feel like I’m about to chunder, but it’s nowhere near as bad and, after a few minutes, I stop shivering. After a few more, I’ve
stopped sweating and my breathing has settled enough that I feel able to stand up straight.

That’s better. My legs feel a little steadier, the breeze cooling my hot cheeks as I suck in a breath and let it out with a relieved sigh. Just as I feel able to loosen my grip on the railing, I’m aware of someone next to me and flinch so suddenly I almost drop my phone into the sea, sure that it’s Dan come to succeed in throwing me in this time.

But it’s not Dan, it’s one of the Roedean girls.
‘Does it make you want to jump?’

I’m too startled to answer as she looks at me with a slow smile. All I can see is her hair. I don’t know what they feed them at Roedean, but they all have such good hair. It’s in a ponytail, which is a lot neater than mine, and it’s red. Not just red, but red. The colour of the sari my mother wore on her wedding day. A rich rust red with threads of gold that, when the sun hits it, makes it look like it’s on fire.

I know I’m staring because all I can think about is whether her eyelashes are the same colour under the layers of mascara. If she notices, though, she has the grace not to say anything, she just keeps smiling. I almost smile back but I catch myself, suspicious of why she’s there. Perhaps she saw my leather jacket and DMs and thinks she can ponce a cigarette from me that she’ll smoke with great flourish. A tiny display of defiance to show her friends how cool she is. Or perhaps she wants to ask me where I’m from so she can tell me about that time she went to India.

Whatever the reason, when I look at her Roedean uniform and her full cheeks, pinched pink by the wind, I can think of
no good reason why a girl like her wants to talk to a girl like me. I mean, side by side, we make no sense. Her, immaculate, the sunlight settling in two moons on the toes of her saddle shoes, and me, greasy and crumpled, a thin layer of sweat drying on my top lip.

‘Does it make you want to jump?’ she asks again before I can ask her what she wants. ‘Like when you’re on a bridge or on a platform and you can hear the train coming and think, I could jump.’

Yes, I almost say, but stop myself again.

She shrugs, tucking her hands into the pockets of her blazer. ‘You’re not the only one.’

Really? I thought there was something wrong with me.

‘Some say it’s healthy.’

Healthy?

‘It’s called high place phenomenon,’ she continues, clearly unfazed by the fact that I haven’t said anything yet. ‘A scientist called Jennifer Hames interviewed a group of students at Florida State University and found that, for the most part anyway, thinking stuff like that is pretty normal.’

How is that normal?

‘It means that you have a healthy will to live.’

‘How does thinking about jumping off a bridge mean you have a healthy will to live?’ I say at last.

Her eyes brighten at the challenge.

‘Cognitive dissonance.’ I like the way she says it, like she doesn’t assume I don’t know what it means. ‘When you’re standing on a bridge you’re not actually in any danger, are you? Not unless someone comes along and pushes you,
which isn’t likely, is it?"

I think of Dan then and quickly conclude that I wouldn’t like to be alone on a bridge with him.

‘It’s all in your head.’ She takes her hand out of her pocket and taps her temple with her finger. ‘When you’re on a bridge, your brain sees the edge and tells you that you’re in danger. So you get scared, but you shouldn’t be scared because you weren’t in any danger, were you?’

I nod, fingers tightening around my phone as the boat jerks suddenly.

‘So later, when you’re trying to rationalise why you were scared, you conclude that it must have been because you wanted to jump, even though you had no desire to.’ She puts her hand back in her pocket and shrugs again. ‘It just means that you’re sensitive to internal cues of danger, which reaffirms your will to live.’

I have no idea what she’s on about, but I like listening to her. She doesn’t talk like anyone I know. She’s not scared if there are a few beats of silence. She just leaves them there.

‘You don’t want to jump. It’s just your brain playing tricks on you. Like now.’ She nods at the sea. ‘Being on this boat is making you think that you’re going to throw up when you don’t actually want to.’

‘I still might.’

She throws her head back and laughs and it’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever heard. This delicate shiver, like the sound my grandmother’s gold bangles make when she’s clapping roti, that grows and grows until it’s so loud – I can feel it in my bones.
I don’t want her to stop, and try to think of something else to say to make her do it again, but then her chin drops and when she looks at me, smiling at me in that same slow way she did when she asked me if I wanted to jump, it’s as though she’s struck a match and set me alight.

We’re talking so much that we miss the discussion about the wonders of renewable energy which means that I will almost certainly fail next week’s test, but I’m struggling to give even half a shit because I want to ask her everything. I know that her name is Poppy Morgan and she’s sixteen, like me, and she’s just started at Roedean after being kicked out of another super-posh boarding school called Wycombe Abbey. I know that she likes to twist her ponytail around her hand when she talks, that she presses her lips together when she’s thinking and that she’s OK with open water, but she doesn’t like heights.

It’s not enough, though. I want to know if she has any brothers or sisters and what her favourite song is so I can go home and listen to it on repeat, but it’s all so perfect. It feels like she and I are encased in a soap bubble that will pop if I am foolish enough to do anything to disturb it.

So I don’t say a word, painfully aware that a clock is ticking somewhere as the shoreline gets closer and closer, and it’s like I’m floating, like I’ve left my body and I’m looking down at us, standing on the deck on the boat and God, it’s perfect. The sky so big that I want to see every corner of it. I tell myself – beg myself, actually – not to overthink it. To just enjoy these last few moments, but the clock is tick, tick, ticking and the shoreline is getting closer and closer and I’m waiting.
Waiting for the bubble to burst, because it always does.

She’s so near that I feel the heat of her next to me, and I warn myself not to make it more than it is. I haven’t done this often, but I’ve done it enough to know how this ends. All the girls in the rainbow T-shirts who kiss girls to impress boys but would die if anyone called them a dyke. The girls with the careless smiles and thirsty hearts who draw lines only they can see and move goalposts when I’m not looking. All those things said and unsaid, never to be spoken of again. All the times I said, ‘OK’ when I really wanted to say, ‘I don’t want to be friends.’

The ghost girls who are there, then not there, who let themselves give into that itch of curiosity, just for a moment, and make me feel something, only to conclude that it isn’t for them. The ones who are bored or scared or both, who’d rather tell me that they were drunk than let me know that they felt something as well because all they want is a quiet life. Someone they can love without it being brave. Someone they can invite over for Sunday lunch and go with to prom.

I am the first and last and nothing in between. The mad one. The wild one. The one who sees things that aren’t there. I am to be unloaded on, to be bled on and cried all over. I am the one they experiment with. The one they can let go with because I’ll never tell. I am the one they have saved in their phone as Alfie or Harry or Luke. The keeper of secrets and soother of guilt. But I am never the one.

I am not to be loved. Not out loud, anyway. Maybe, one day, if I’m lucky, I’ll be a what if?. Or worse, the one before the one. The one that made them realise that it wasn’t just a phase.
But, for the most part, I will barely be a footnote in the book of that quiet life they want so much and as I stand beside Poppy, looking out at the wide, wild sea, I wait. Wait for her to move away when one of the Roedean girls approaches or to suddenly mention a boyfriend like this is nothing, like she’s just talking. Like that’s all this is, just talking. After all, even fear becomes a habit after a while, doesn’t it?

We’re approaching the Marina and this is it, I know. The moment has passed. The pain in my chest is so keen that it brings tears to my eyes as I make myself look down at the water so Poppy doesn’t see as the boat pulls in. When I do, I notice that the water is a different colour here. A colour I’ve only seen in postcards from other people. Poppy must notice as well, because she says that we could be in the Côte d’Azur. She says it with a dreamy sigh and when she closes her eyes, she suddenly feels very far away, even though she’s standing right next to me.

The nearest I’ve ever been to the French Riviera – or France in general – is a croissant from the Real Patisserie, and it’s as close as I’m ever likely to get. But for whatever reason, our paths crossed today – call it luck or fate or good old-fashioned magic – and they’re about to part, never to cross again. I mean, it’s not like I’m going to bump into her at Lidl or waiting for the 1A, is it? This is it, I know, as the boat docks. She’ll just be that girl I think about sometimes when I look out at the wind farm or when I eat a croissant.

‘Here.’ Poppy takes my phone out of my hand so suddenly, I don’t have a chance to object. When she gives it back, I look at the screen to find that she’s added her number to my contacts.
'If you ever feel like jumping,' she says, the corners of her mouth twitching mischievously when I look up again. ‘Or a coffee.’

My chest hurts for a different reason this time because I want to see her again – I really want to see her again – and she wants to see me and that never happens. I don’t know what to say, so I just smile back as she winks at me. I watch her turn and walk away, her hips swinging and her hair ablaze, and I wonder if there are words for how this feels but I don’t know what they are yet.