

We Know You Know

Also by Erin Kelly

*The Poison Tree*

*The Sick Rose*

*The Burning Air*

*The Ties that Bind*

*He Said/She Said*

With Chris Chibnall

*Broadchurch*

*Erin Kelly*

# We Know You Know

  
HODDER

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For Owen Kelly, whose trespass inspired this book

*In its first year of operation we are pleased to report that this asylum has no equal in the Region or beyond. The building is equipped for the most modern treatments and tranquillity is promoted by its healthy locality, its spacious rooms and galleries. The sun and the air are allowed to enter at every window. The propensity for female insanity is recognised in the design, with eighteen female wards and fourteen male. Indeed, many women committed due to domestic discord or excess of childbearing request to stay.*

Sir Warwick Chase, Chief Inspector of Asylums  
and Advisor for the Commission of Lunacy  
Extracted from the first Annual Report on  
The East Anglia Pauper Lunatic Asylum, 1868

PART ONE  
PARK ROYAL MANOR  
2018

# 1

The blindfold hurts. His inexperience shows in the knot. It's tight but crude, and has captured a hank of my hair. Every time he takes a corner too fast, I rock to the side, the seatbelt slicing my shoulder and the tiny needlepoint pain in my scalp intensifying. He brakes without warning: I'm thrown forward. A loosening of the purple silk near my right temple lets in a little light but no information.

He has gone for full sensory deprivation. There is no music, only the rhythm of my breath and his, the bassline of the engine, the key changes of the shifting gears. The radio would help. An accumulation of three-minute pop songs would let me measure time. If forced to guess, I would say that we have been travelling for an hour but it could be half an hour or it could be two. I know that we drove out of London, not deeper into it, and that we must be far out of town now. For the first couple of miles I could track our route by the stop-start of traffic lights and speedbumps. It takes ten minutes to escape Islington's 20-mile-an-hour zone in any direction. I'm sure I smelled the barbecue restaurant on City Road but I think he circled the Old Street roundabout twice to confuse me and after that I was lost.

Once we were out of the city and moving fast, my nose caught a couple of bonfires – it's that time of year – but they had the woody feel of a domestic pile rather than anything agricultural or industrial. Sometimes it feels like we're in the middle of nowhere, winding through lanes, then he'll go smooth and fast again, and the rush of passing traffic will tell me we're back on an A-road. If we were heading for an airport, I would have expected the boom as the jets graze the motorway. I will not get on an aeroplane.



‘Shit,’ he mutters and brakes again. The last few strands of caught hair spring loose from their moorings. I can feel him shift in the seat, his breath skimming my cheek as he reverses slowly. I take the opportunity to put my hand up to my head, but he’s watching me as well as the road.

‘Marianne! You *promised!*’

‘Sorry,’ I say. ‘It’s really getting on my nerves now. What if I close my eyes while I re-tie it? Or while *you* re-tie it.’

‘Nice try,’ he says. ‘Look, it’s not far now.’

How near is not far? Another minute? Another thirty? If I twitch my cheek I can see a little more. What light I can sense starts to flicker rapidly through the violet gauze. Sunlight through a fence? The pattern is liminal, more irregular than that. We’re in a tree tunnel, which means a country lane, which means—

‘Sam! Have you booked us into a spa?’

I can hear the smile in his voice. ‘I think I’ve done better than *that.*’

My shoulders relax, as though the masseur’s hands are already on them. I can’t think of anything better than two days being pummelled floppy by muscular young women in white tunics. It must be that organic place on the Essex coast I’ve been longing to try. I could relax in Essex. I could get to Mum in an hour and to Honor in two. Maybe, when Sam says he’s done better than that, he’s even arranged for Honor to *be* here.

The road is uneven now, all potholes and gravel, and I put my hands up, ready to unwind the scarf.

‘Two more minutes!’ Sam’s voice vaults an octave. ‘I want to see you see it.’ The tyres crunch. I wait patiently with my hands in my lap as the parking sensors quicken their beep. ‘OK, now,’ he says, undoing the knot with a flourish. ‘Welcome to Park Royal Manor.’

The name is familiar from the brochures and so is the image but shock delays its formation.

I see it as a series of architectural features – crenellations and gables, fussy grey stonework, tall forbidding windows – but I can’t take in its breadth.

‘I’m too near,’ I try to say, but it comes out in a whisper.

Nazareth Hospital, or The East Anglia Pauper Lunatic Asylum as it originally was, wasn’t designed to be viewed up close like this but as a whole, from a distance, whether you were being admitted to it or whether it was one last haunted look over your shoulder as you left or ran away. The last time I saw the place, and the way I still see it in my dreams, was from afar. It seemed to fill the horizon. It is perched on what counts for a hill around here, its width a warning to the flat country around it. Built to serve three counties, it is too big for modest Suffolk, its soaring Victorian dimensions all wrong.

I can drive from London to Nusstead almost on autopilot so how did I not recognise the journey?

Sam rubs his hands together in glee. ‘How much d’you love me right now? Come on, let’s have a proper look at the place.’ He reaches across me and thumbs my seatbelt unlocked. I cannot get out of the car. A scream claws its way up the sides of my throat.

The pictures in the brochure didn’t do the changes justice. The floor-to-ceiling panelled windows have been unbarred, hundreds of uncracked panes in new frames. The ivy and buddleia that sprouted impossibly from tilting chimney pots and rotting lintels has gone, replaced by a Virginia creeper whose remaining deep red leaves are neatly trimmed to expose silver brick. The vast double doors have been replaced by sheets of sliding glass with ‘Park Royal Manor’ etched in opaque curlicue. My eyes refuse to go any higher.

‘What . . .’ I begin. ‘What are we doing here, Sam? What are we *doing* here?’

He mistakes panic for surprise. ‘I got you a little pied-à-terre. No more crashing on Colette’s sofa or shelling out for a hotel.’

I look down but that’s even worse. No, I can’t see the renovated clocktower but I can see its shadow, like the cast of a giant sundial, a dark grey finger pointing right at me. For all the fancy ironwork of its clock face the tower was only ever a lookout post in disguise – Nazareth ran on its own time – and I feel watched now. I pull the

blindfold clumsily back down over my eyes, the hem of the scarf catching in my mouth.

‘Marianne?’ says Sam, staring at me. ‘Marianne, what’s the matter?’

It isn’t a scream after all but its opposite, a dry desperate sucking in of air that contains no oxygen, only dust. ‘I can’t go in,’ I manage. ‘Please, Sam, don’t make me go back.’

## 2

‘What the hell’s the matter?’ We are parked under a huge cedar, far enough around the curved driveway that the place is out of sight. The needling leaves are a black canopy above us. I’m embarrassed by the force of my reaction and trying desperately to downplay it but it’s too late. Sam’s face has changed. Gone is the eagerness of two minutes ago, replaced by the expression I saw when he took the first call about my mother, or the one I see when Honor’s back in the Larches and he’s waiting for me in reception. He hands me a bottle of water. The cedars make a soft susurrus.

Jesse carved our initials on one of these trees, JJB & MS surrounded by a heart. Sometimes these carvings grow more pronounced over the years as the trunk spreads and the scarring expands.

‘I’m so sorry,’ I say, and that’s all I can manage because I am seventeen again, in the echoing wards. Words going up in flame, lives reduced to tick sheets and doctors’ rounds. Keys turning in locks. Smashed glass and running. The things that define me fall away; mother, wife, work. The title in front of my name and the letters after it erase themselves, and I am made of my past. The thought of re-entry feels like – the comparison makes itself before I can help it – an electric shock.

‘I mean, I thought you’d *love* it,’ Sam says. ‘I thought I’d be carrying you across the threshold now – there’s champagne in the fridge. If you don’t like this place, why did you have all the estate agent’s brochures under the bed? I wasn’t snooping; they weren’t hidden.’ It’s a bloody good question, it’s *the* question, and one I can never let him know the answer to. I feel the need to keep tabs on the place, much as I do on Jesse. Relationships with people

and places can be intense and reluctant at the same time. I have read those brochures on my own, my secret bedtime story, turning the pages slowly as if I could catch the lie, as though only care kept the dark truth of then from emerging through the gloss of now. Sometimes, when the masochistic compulsion to keep looking was at its worst, I had to take something to knock me out, something so powerful that it was all I could do to slide the pages down the side of the bed before passing out. ‘I thought it must be your dream home, the way you stashed it all away. The hoops I’ve had to jump through to get a mortgage without you knowing. All right, maybe I shouldn’t have surprised you, but you’re acting like I’ve done something *bad*.’

For a wild second I consider telling him the truth, but, ‘It’s a phobia,’ I say to my lap. My shame isn’t feigned: I’m lying to someone who doesn’t deserve it. ‘A childhood phobia. I just . . . this place. I wasn’t expecting it.’

‘But you can see it from Colette’s house. It’s never bothered you before.’

‘It’s three miles from Colette’s,’ I say, on the defensive but at least regaining control of my heartbeat, of my head. ‘When I was little, Nazareth Hospital was the local haunted house. It’s what you’d make up stories about on camping trips. Escaped lunatics running out across the fens with their manacles still around their ankles, out to get you in your bed. I used to have nightmares about the place.’ That much is true: only the tense is a lie.

‘Oh, darling.’ There’s laughter in his voice. ‘Sorry. But – it is ironic. You’ve got to admit it. A History of Architecture lecturer with a crippling phobia of an *old building*.’

‘I know, right?’ I smile weakly. Of course it’s not an irony or even coincidence. My whole career has been a way of trying to understand, and control, this place.

‘And then the first time you ever actually come here, I spring it on you like something out of a bloody Hammer Horror. Even when I try, I can’t get anything right, can I?’

It suddenly strikes me what Sam has done: the time and effort and the money that goes into buying a property, that he has done all of this without ever asking for my help, in the middle of a huge project, and that he has done it for me, to make life easier for the wife he thinks he knows and the family he married into.

‘God, you must think I’m such an ungrateful bitch. Thank you, Sam. It’s one of the kindest things anyone’s ever done for me.’ I force a smile. It feels like it’s going to split my lips but it works: Sam looks pleased with himself again.

‘Good. I know it means a lot to your mum.’

This gets my head up fast. ‘You told my *mum* about this? Did she even understand?’

‘Well, Colette can remind her.’

‘*Colette* knows? I don’t know what’s more astonishing: that you went behind my back or that she kept a secret.’ My sister is the biggest gossip in Nusstead; my mother’s old mantle, it fits her perfectly.

‘I’m a man of hidden depths.’ Sam’s joking, but I don’t like it. Hidden depths are not what I signed up for. Amanda, my head of department, once rhapsodised about her complex, enigmatic husband, saying that she had married him because she knew she would never get to the bottom of him. I can’t think of anything worse. Sam is not a shallow pool but he is a crystal clear one. Initiative is for his drawing board, not for his marriage. He is solid, in character as well as in body. We agree on everything, except, occasionally, how to manage our daughter. I trust him. Not enough to tell him of course, but in the sense that he won’t hurt me. Anyone who thinks that predictability is a poor reward for security cannot have known real fear.

The sun dips behind the hospital roof and the temperature drops suddenly. It always used to do this, I remember: night would fall on the forecourt hours before true sunset.

‘It’s getting cold,’ says Sam, rubbing my arms. ‘Let’s go and unpack. I mean – it was just the shock of it, right? Now you know what to expect, we can go in. You’ll feel better once you’ve

unpacked, made it your own. You know what it looks like inside, if you've seen the brochures. It's not at all spooky.' His tummy growls loudly. 'We can get a Deliveroo,' he suggests.

'Sam, you're in rural Suffolk. There's only one takeaway round here and even they don't deliver. Let's go out.'

Anything to get the place behind me. Anything to play for time.