

THE DOCTOR'S WIFE

He thinks his
secret is safe.



But she knows
the truth...

DANIEL HURST

An absolutely gripping and unputdownable psychological thriller with a shocking twist

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PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER WITH A SHOCKING
TWIST

DANIEL HURST

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CONTENTS

[Prologue](#)

[TWO WEEKS EARLIER](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[The Holiday Home](#)

[Hear More from Daniel](#)

[Books by Daniel Hurst](#)

[A Letter from Daniel](#)

PROLOGUE

As the woman at the window watched the activity on the beach, she knew the body on the sand was going to be the event that turned this quiet seaside village into a hive of activity for several days to come. This isolated place was usually only frequented by local residents, delivery drivers from the nearby towns and the occasional tourist passing in and out of Scotland. Now it would be teeming with forensic experts, journalists and bystanders harbouring a morbid curiosity.

That was the thing about the appearance of a body in an unexpected place.

It demanded attention.

And it always got it.

That was never more evident than on the day that the body of Drew Devlin was discovered sprawled out on the stretch of sand that lined this picturesque piece of coastline in the North of England.

The wet, white T-shirt that clung to the twisted torso was the same colour as the cloud-filled sky above, and the temperature of the corpse was as cold as the weather in this rainswept, wind-battered part of the country. The black shorts covering the pale, lifeless thighs were almost as dark as the sky on the horizon, another storm incoming for a village that had already endured so much and had even more trying challenges to come. And one grey trainer on the left foot, slowly losing its pristine condition as specks of dirt and sand were flicked onto it by the rolling tide that washed against the body in a weary fashion, and what could be considered a disrespectful one too.

The shoe that should have been on the right foot was missing, but if anybody looked for it then they would surely see it bobbing around in the sea several feet away, like a ship without a sailor, drifting aimlessly, most likely to come back to land with a bump at some point but, for now,

completely at the mercy of the ice-cold current.

But nobody was looking at the shoe. Everybody was looking at the person it belonged to and that included the woman at the window. She kept watching as the emergency services came to carry out their grim tasks, and she continued to watch as the sun began to set on this terrible day. That was because the body out there on the sand was of a man that she had once loved. But she hadn't been the only one in this village who had loved the deceased. He was popular with the opposite sex, too popular, if anything.

And that was one of the reasons why he was now dead.

TWO WEEKS EARLIER

ONE

FERN

As the car I'm a passenger in comes to a stop on the sweeping driveway of my idyllic new home, a million thoughts are running through my mind. For me, the day an adult moves to a new house is not too dissimilar to the day a child starts at a new school. There's an air of nervousness that accompanies the worry of whether the right thing is being done. There is the dull ache of anxiety in the pit of the stomach caused by the regret of leaving old friends behind and the possibility that new friends might be harder to come by in this fresh setting. And, most of all, there is the unmistakable realisation that no matter what happens next, life is never going to be the same again.

How could I describe this new place? For starters, I'd say it's very different to the house I'm moving from, although that's not necessarily a bad thing. I mean, who can ever complain about upsizing, right? But there's more to life than size, as any woman likes to remind a man, so I have always been smart enough to look beyond that and get into the details.

Technically, this property is a beautiful structure, a two-floor whitewashed building consisting of four bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen I once only dreamed about and the type of dining room that would be perfect for entertaining guests. That's before even mentioning the spacious lounge area and the gorgeous back garden that seems to go on forever. But as good as all that is, it's more about what's at the front of the location of the house, which is even more stunning than what's inside or behind it. That's because the property couldn't be located in a more idyllic spot. Built just across the road from sand and water, the house overlooks the Solway Firth, a stretch of water between England and Scotland that forms part of the border between the two nations. And what a pretty border it is. On a day with fine weather, much like today, and the previous day I

came here to inspect the property, the views are incredible, you can see for miles both along the water's edge and also straight across, meaning a person can be standing in one country but looking at another.

It's incredible to be able to see Scotland on a clear day, or 'The Bonnie Banks' as it has been referred to in the past by many a person. That might sound all well and good, but this is the UK, so what's it like on a bad-weather day? Fortunately, I've not been here to experience one of those yet, but I can safely assume this place has a very different feel to it when the sun is obscured, the clouds have wrapped themselves around the landscape, and the grains of sand on the beach are being peppered with ice-cold raindrops from the heavens.

But it's not the prospect of inclement weather that is giving me cause for concern about moving here, nor is it the property itself, because it really is a stunning place and one anybody would be lucky to call their own. No, there is one other reason why I have my reservations about what I am doing as I sit in my car and think about the new future I have agreed to be a part of, and the simplest way of describing my state of mind at the moment is this:

Conflicted.

Ask around, and I'm sure there are plenty of people I've known over the years who would be happy to describe me. But if I had to describe myself then I'd sum myself up in three words.

A city girl.

That's right, I love a concrete jungle. The high-rise buildings. The coffee shops on every corner. The bars and restaurants that stay open late and the cafes that open early. The shopping centres and the parks. The intimate theatres and the cavernous arenas. The choice of supermarkets and the array of transport links. And the people, oh so many people. Commuters. Students. Retailers. Baristas. Waiters. Street performers. Joggers. Dogwalkers. All hustling and bustling with places to go and people to see. Bumping elbows with one another on the train or just standing behind each other in the line to get a mocha.

Energy. Vibrancy. Life.

I've always lived in a city. Manchester mainly, as that's where I grew up and have spent most of my adult life, only broken up by a three-year spell at York University and a two-year work placement in the biggest English city of all, London. Those experiences mean I have never known anything other than 24/7 noise and action and funny smells and the chance to find somewhere open to enjoy a drink, whether it's 3 p.m. or 3 a.m., and while some people might hate it, I bloody love it.

As far as I'm concerned, a city isn't just a big collection of buildings, it's actually a living, breathing organism made up of the people who call it home, and I have always been one of those people.

Until today.

Now I am no longer a city dweller. Rather, I am somebody who has to find comfort in open spaces, long silences and, most of all, solitude. From a population of over two million to barely five hundred, and I'm pretty sure that is counting the sheep in the nearby hills too.

So long, Manchester.

Hello, Arberness.

Of the people who live in this village, I'm told that the majority are those whose relatives had lived here before them. There have been several generations of the same family around here, and not many of them left the village for bigger and busier pastures, instead staying because they took pride in their remote region and saw the beauty in being somewhere less overrun than the cities and towns nearby. But a few residents were not born here nor had they any previous connection to the village before they settled in it. Instead, they are simply people shunning the major metropolitan hubs and seeking the quiet life as they grow older in a place where there is certainly plenty of quiet.

There's no doubt about it.

This is going to take some getting used to.

'I guess we should get out and give the removal guys some help.'

The voice of the man sitting beside me in the car snaps me out of my trance, and when I turn to look at him, I see that he is smiling at me. It's a nice smile. A handsome one. The same one that charmed me all those years ago, when I first saw it flashed in my direction, and the same smile I saw as I made my way down the aisle in my white dress. His smile was wide then, and it's certainly wide now, but I've never seen it bigger than on the day six months ago when I agreed to leave our old life behind and move here, to this remote place, to start again with the man that I married.

Yep, this move was my husband's idea. I'll make that clear now, just in case everything goes wrong soon, which is a very real possibility. That's right, moving out here to the middle of nowhere was the thought and suggestion of Drew Devlin, or Doctor Drew Devlin, as he likes to introduce himself to others.

'I didn't spend all those years at medical school just to be another Drew,' he told me once as we were on our way home from a dinner party, and after I'd asked him why he insisted on giving his professional title outside of the workplace. 'It's important to include that little extra word at

the beginning of my name. I worked hard for it and, if nothing else, it's a conversation starter.'

I hadn't bothered to challenge him on that, although I did tease him a little about it just for fun. I also made sure to tell him that it didn't matter to me whether he was Doctor Drew, Dentist Drew or even just Dreary Drew because he was my man, and I was proud of him whatever he did for work.

But while I didn't often mention to my husband how much I liked the fact that he was a fully qualified and practising doctor, because his ego certainly didn't need another boost, the truth is that I love what he does for a living. It's a well-respected and very important profession, not to mention well paid, as well as being very convenient whenever I have any symptoms that I might need a quick opinion on.

There's never a need for me to wait for an appointment when I can just lift up my T-shirt and ask the man in bed beside me if my new mole looks like it might be trouble. It might not be my sexiest move but when you're pushing forty, as I am, being sexy is way down on the To-Do List.

But it's not all fun being a doctor's wife. That's because a job in the medical profession demands dedication, diligence and, most of all, a willingness to work long hours to see all the patients who have illnesses and ailments that require special care and attention. It's simply not possible for a doctor to do a half-hearted job. It's all or nothing, give great care or no care at all. And Doctor Drew always prides himself on giving the best care to his patients that he can. The problem was, he had just too many of those pesky patients, hence the idea to move out of the city and continue his career somewhere a little quieter.

'Imagine it. With less patients to see every day, I can finish at five o'clock, or maybe even earlier,' Drew had told me when he was pitching me the idea. 'Isn't that what you've always wanted? More time together? Well, it's never going to happen here. But if we move, it can be a reality.'

I remember the expression on his face when he had said those words to me, or rather I remember his piercing blue eyes staring into my own and making me feel like they always did, which was special. He has always had that power over me, like I imagine all good-looking men have over women, in that one look could usually melt a heart and get him what he wanted. The fact he always has such relaxed body language helps him too. He's never stiff or unsure. He always acts as if he is fully confident about what he is saying and, I guess, for the most part he is.

'You know I want you to finish work earlier,' I'd agreed, much preferring having my husband home at a decent hour as opposed to him

walking through the front door at seven or eight o'clock, grumbling about a backlog of referral letters and an overcrowded waiting room. 'But it's a bit extreme to go from here to there, isn't it? I mean, we have everything we could ever need here. Family, friends, all our favourite places. What would we have there?'

'Oh, I don't know. How about peace? Tranquillity. Fresh air. Miles of open space to relax in. Long walks on the beach. Village fetes. An actual community to be a part of rather than just being another statistic squashed into an overpopulated section of the country. And, most importantly, for the first time in my life, and our marriage, a proper work/life balance.'

I had to give it to Drew. He did make a compelling argument for why we should consider moving. But it was an argument that he would have to sharpen and refine over several days before I eventually started to come around to his way of thinking.

'I can see you're really serious about this,' I had told him one night after he had come home grumpy again from another tiring day. 'You know I have my concerns about it. But if it's really what you want then I'll do it. I'll agree to move. But on one condition. We find the perfect house. If I'm going to be in the middle of nowhere surrounded by nothing but bleating sheep and crazy village folk, I at least want a nice kitchen. You promised me a breakfast bar when we were engaged, and I'm yet to see any evidence of one.'

That breakfast bar was just one of many grand ambitions I had harboured ever since I got into a serious relationship with Drew. We'd often lie in bed together for hours in the early days of our romance and discuss all sorts of dreams, some sensible, some a little crazier. Places we wanted to visit. Cars we wanted to drive. What we wanted to be doing when we reach retirement age. I'm pleased to say that many of those dreams came true. But, as always in life, some fell by the wayside.

I've never seen Drew so happy as the night I agreed that we would leave Manchester and move to Arberness, a place he picked, he told me, because he had been there a couple of times while coming back from lads' trips to Scotland, and it had always captured his imagination. I was yet to be as convinced as he was that the tiny village was the best place for us to begin the next chapter of our lives, but once I'd agreed the moving plans began in earnest. Our house went on the market for a very profitable price while we quickly set about finding a new home in the village. It only took a couple of trips up north before we found the house we wanted.

'It's perfect,' Drew had told me before I had even laid eyes on it, but once I had, I felt the same way. As anyone in a marriage will know,

agreeing on something is half the battle, but this was one thing we didn't have an argument on. The house was perfect. The size, the location, the price. It ticked every box we had when we first made contact with an estate agent. And here we are now, with the removal men carrying our boxes into it.

And so, as Drew and I get out of our car, it is now official. We live here now. Not back there in the city, where everything is familiar and accessible, but here, where everything is new, spread out and smells strange, as if my nostrils can't quite understand why the air is clean and not filled with exhaust fumes.

Have I done the right thing, or have I made a mistake? Am I going to like it here or grow to resent it? Will I make new friends, or will my only company during the working week be whatever sheep wanders up to the wall at the bottom of our garden? And will I fall in love with the view of the beach at the front of my house, or will its sands start to torment me over time, causing me to long for the familiar feeling of the hard concrete of the city streets that I once walked on with such confidence?

I suppose only time will tell. But as we go inside our new house and think about making a start on unpacking all the boxes that are beginning to pile up in our hallway, I know one thing is for sure.

My husband is very, very happy to be here.

Possibly a little *too* happy.

TWO

DREW

I did it. What seemed like an impossible task has now been achieved. I persuaded my wife to leave behind the city that she loves and accompany me here, and now that we have officially made the move, everything is still on track. I'm so giddy I could do a little dance, but that is not quite appropriate, plus I don't want to embarrass myself in front of the removal guys who are just leaving, so I keep a lid on my excitement for now. I really am happy, and it has nothing at all to do with this new house. It's simply because I've got my own way.

Fern believes me.

She thinks I suggested this because I'm seeking the quiet life.

If only she knew the truth.

'Can you take that upstairs, please?' my wife asks me as she points to a very heavy-looking cardboard box with the words 'master bedroom' scrawled across it in black marker pen. 'I guess the removal guys didn't take the time to read the notes I made for them and check which room these boxes were supposed to go in.'

'It's my fault. I should have monitored them more,' I say before letting out a weary groan as I lift the box and head for the stairs.

'I guess they got distracted with all the football talk,' Fern replies with a wry smile, referring to how I got into such a deep conversation about the current state of Manchester United with the removals men that they ended up having to hurry to finish on time.

'I was just being friendly. I imagine they welcome a distraction in their line of work. Not everyone loves their job like I do.'

I'm exaggerating a little about how much I adore my profession as I climb the stairs, but there is some truth in it. I once took great pride in being a doctor, following in the footsteps of my father who pretended like he would have been happy for me to do anything career-wise, but clearly

harboured hopes that I would follow him into the medical profession. I had my doubts but armed with the requisite intellect to not only study medicine but pass all the exams and tests along the way, I found myself warming to the idea of being a GP. It was a proud day when I became fully qualified, more for my parents than for me, and I have tried to retain that sense of pride throughout my career, although the fantasy of the job differs somewhat from the reality of it. It seems less about helping to save lives and more about managing bureaucracy now, definitely more than it was in my father's day, but I don't want too many people to know that. That's because I like the respect and admiration I get from others when they find out what I do for a living, and it'll only be tainted if they discover that most of my day is spent pushing paper at my desk.

Or at least it used to be anyway.

But here in Arberness, I'll have fewer patients, which means I can give a better quality of care. I might also get five minutes in between individual consultations to have a breather as well, which will be a big bonus. Gone are the days when I couldn't even go to the toilet or eat a sandwich without feeling like I was adding another delay to an already severely bogged down system. Things should be sleeker here, more manageable and, ultimately, easier than they were in Manchester. That place was stressful on a good day and downright overwhelming on a bad one due to the sheer bulk of the workload thrust upon me.

I put down the heavy box in the master bedroom, alongside all the other ones that made it up here earlier, and a quick examination of the room highlights just how much work Fern and I have ahead of ourselves before we get this place looking like we want it to. Right now, it looks more like a warehouse than a home, but we'll get there, or at least my wife will. I'm due to start work tomorrow, which means I won't be around to help out here as much as I could do, but I know Fern will manage it. Besides, it'll keep her occupied and reduce the chances of her getting bored, then lonely, then asking for us to move back to Manchester. The busier she is, the less likely it is she will find out what I am really here for.

I should go back downstairs and help move the next box, but, before I do, I walk over to the window and gaze out across the water that now forms what will be the first thing we see every day when we open the curtains. While taking in the beauty of the area, I think about the real reason I made us move here, and as lovely as the scenery is, it has nothing to do with that at all.

Instead, it has everything to do with Alice.

I let out a deep sigh as I think about the one woman I truly love, the

woman I am not married to but who has got such a place in my heart that I have been willing to uproot my life and start again up here, in what is essentially the middle of nowhere. I think about where she might be now, and know that wherever she is, it can't be far from where I am. That's because Alice lives in this village, too, and considering how small it is I'll never be more than a couple of streets away from her at any one time. That thought warms my bones, and I'm sure I'll need that warmth during these colder months as the temperature plunges and causes this place to feel a little less tranquil and a lot more testing.

My eyes stay on the water as I think about Alice and how good it will be to be with her again. It's been six long months since I've seen her beautiful face, and I've spent all that time recapping the final conversation we had. It was the one in which she told me that our affair was over. To prove it, she was moving away from Manchester and starting again with her husband, Rory, who had no idea his wife had been unfaithful to him. Just like my wife had no idea I'd done the same to her.

To say I was devastated at Alice's decision would be an understatement. Of course, I knew what we were doing was wrong, seeing each other behind our respective partner's backs and all, but it wasn't just some casual fling that was purely about sex. No, our relationship ran much deeper than that. I fell in love with Alice during the course of our affair and, despite what she said the last time we spoke, I know that she fell in love with me too.

Our affair started a year ago on what had been an otherwise average and mundane day in my life as a city-centre GP. After spending twelve long hours handing out prescriptions for painkillers and convincing most of the patients that the mild symptoms they were reporting to me didn't mean they were, in fact, dying, I'd been in need of a strong drink. That's why I'd called into the pub just around the corner from my workplace, so I could grab a beer before heading home and telling my wife, Fern, all about my day. But my life was to change forever, not long after I had ordered that beer, because no sooner had I taken my seat at the bar and given the nod to the barman to pour me a pint, than I noticed her.

The long blonde hair. The shapely curves. And the smile that made me feel like I was a teenager again. I had no idea who the pretty woman in the pub was because I'd never seen her around that part of the city before.

But oh, how I wished I had.

I wished she was one of my patients and came to see me every week, even if there was nothing wrong with her. Doctors hate hypochondriacs, but I'd have given anything to have had her as my number one patient,

knocking on my door every day with some new report of a false illness that she might have. Anything to be near her. To talk to her. To find out more.

I knew the chances of a woman like her stumbling into my surgery were slim and not just because she looked positively healthy. It was because, quite simply, I wasn't that lucky. Only incredibly good fortune could allow me to cross paths with someone like *her* and, while I had a good life in terms of being married, having a stable career and enough family and friends around me to never feel lonely, I knew meeting *her* would somehow top it all.

I had sat and watched her from across the pub as she chatted with a female friend at a table over in the corner, but I barely tasted my beer as I sipped it because I was so lost in fantasising about my new discovery.

What was her name? Where did she live? What did she do for work?

And most importantly of all, would she be interested in talking to me?

The sight of the small diamond ring on her left hand didn't put me off at all because I had my own wedding ring on too. But, at that moment, I hadn't been thinking about any potential affair and certainly not about how getting involved with her could cause my life to change in all sorts of unpredictable ways. I'd simply wanted her to notice me. To see me. To admire me like I was admiring her.

I had no choice but to order another beer as I had sat and waited in that pub for the pretty woman in the corner to potentially come nearer, and eventually my patience paid off. With the venue having grown busier around us, she had approached the bar to get another round of drinks and, once she was closer to me, I didn't miss my chance.

I complimented her on her appearance, cutting straight to the chase because I didn't have time to waste, nor did I want to be like every other man in the place who was simply looking at her but not doing anything about it. She accepted the compliment before returning it by telling me that she liked my suit and then asking if I worked in an office.

As always, I jumped at the chance to tell her that I was a doctor. I saw that my profession impressed her, based on the look in her eyes as I spoke. I made sure to show more of an interest in her by asking plenty of questions of my own and, pretty soon, ordering another drink was the last thing on her mind. After her friend joined us, presumably to find out why her drink was taking so long to materialise, she lied and told her I was an old acquaintance from university, and highlighted how unlikely it was for the two of us to have bumped into one another after all these years, but that was clearly just a ploy to get the friend to leave the two of us alone. Once

the friend had departed, we stayed together in that pub until closing time, talking and flirting until it genuinely looked like we were old friends and not just two people who had only just met.

I didn't get a kiss from Alice that night, mainly because both of us knew the other one was taken, and we were still trying to do the right thing. But I did get her phone number and that was all I needed to keep in touch with her and set up future meetings, meetings that I was sure would eventually result in us being intimate.

And sure enough, they did.

All my late arrivals home were easy to dismiss with Fern: I just told her that work was crazy, and she believed it because work had always been that way for me. But rather than being stuck in my doctor's surgery drowning beneath a pile of prescriptions, I was checking in and out of city-centre hotels with Alice and feeling more alive than I had felt in years.

Obviously, I felt bad about what I was doing behind Fern's back, just like Alice felt bad about what she was doing to her partner, Rory. But we just couldn't help ourselves. Like a child finding themselves with the key to a sweet shop, we were making the most of the opportunity to do whatever we wanted. It was dangerous, and I knew I would break Fern's heart if she ever found out about it, but I was confident that would never happen. We'd kept it secret for long enough, so why couldn't we keep doing that forever?

The way I saw it, it wasn't mine or Alice's fault that we had met each other *after* we had already settled down. It was just life. Mad, unpredictable life. The main thing was that we had found each other, and as we were still only on the cusp of forty, I felt like we still had plenty of time to enjoy ourselves in secret.

And then Alice told me she was ending it and moving away.

I grit my teeth as I remain standing by the bedroom window, watching the water swilling and sloshing around in the bay. The hurt I felt when Alice told me that I was to leave her alone and never contact her again is still very much real, even if half a year has passed and she probably thinks I've forgotten about her now. But I haven't. I'm as madly in love with her as I was the first time I saw her in that pub, and that's why I've taken the rather extreme measure of moving here. Alice has no idea that I am going to come back into her life, but, when she realises what I have done, she will surely see that I am serious about us and give our love affair another go. It's just a shame an affair is all it can ever be. That's because we can never be together properly, not as an official couple. That would require me to leave Fern and, despite considering this as an option many times, I

don't think it's a viable one. That's because Fern knows too many things about me.

Things I'm not proud of.

And things that could get me in serious trouble if they ever came out.

I don't see what I am doing as stalking. I see it as romantic. I hope Alice will see it the same way. As for Fern and Rory, they won't know what is going on, just like they had no idea before, and I'll keep it that way until Alice is back in my arms again. But there is a small chance Alice might not react well to my reappearance and, just in case, I'm not burning any bridges with my wife. Better to be a married man with a complicated love life than a divorced doctor whom everyone pities.

For now, I'll keep my little secret and see how all of this plays out.

What does life in this village have in store for me?

Well, just like in the city, I'm going to do everything I can to get exactly what I want.

THREE

FERN

The first person to visit us in our new home is Audrey, our elderly next-door neighbour, and she doesn't come empty-handed.

'I've made you a lasagne,' she says as I welcome her in with the hot dish she is carrying. 'I imagine all your pots and pans are still in boxes, so I thought you might need something quick for your dinner this evening. It won't take long to heat up. You do have a microwave, don't you?'

'Yes, of course. Thank you, that's very kind of you,' I tell her as she steps into my wide and well-lit hallway, and I lock the door behind her.

'Oh, you don't need to worry about locking your doors here, dear. There is no crime in Arberness.'

'Sorry, just a habit from living in the city,' I say, not sure why I'm apologising for locking my own front door, nor why I lied about it being more out of habit than anything else. The truth is I would always lock the door to my house no matter where I am, who I am with and what time of day it might be. A person can never be too careful, even in a low-crime area like this one.

'Ahh, so you've moved here from the city, have you?' Audrey says as I gratefully accept the dish from her and invite her to follow me into the kitchen. 'Well, I won't hold that against you.'

She lets me know she's only teasing, and I laugh, warming to her even more.

'So, what took you so long to come to your senses and move out to the country?'

'It was my idea actually.'

Drew appears then, popping up out of the dining room with another box in his hands and a big smile on his face. He never has any trouble charming people, and I suspect he's going to get straight to work charming our new neighbour. Sure enough, he does just that, putting the box down