


**YOUR DAUGHTER IS MISSING . . .  
BUT IS IT YOUR FAULT?**

# CLOSE YOUR EYES



**TERESA DRISCOLL**

**THE TWO MILLION COPY BESTSELLING AUTHOR**

CLOSE  
YOUR  
EYES

# ALSO BY TERESA DRISCOLL

*Recipes for Melissa*

*Last Kiss Goodnight*

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*The Friend*

*The Promise*

*I Will Make You Pay*

*Her Perfect Family*

*Tell Me Lies*

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TERESA DRISCOLL

 **THOMAS & MERCER**



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CLOSE  
YOUR  
EYES

# PART ONE

# CHAPTER 1

## SALLY – DAY ONE

She will come to regret the tussle in the shop more than anything else in her life. Very soon she will lie in the dark, replaying every word. Every expression on her daughter's face.

But in the moment in Freda's Fashions, Sally Hill can know none of this. In the moment, all she knows is she is stretched. And tired. And running very late.

'Can I try this on, Mummy?'

Sally turns, phone in hand, to see Amelie holding up a green dress on a hanger.

'Sorry, darling. We don't have time.' Sally's gaze is straight back to her phone, scrolling for the party invitation. Amelie's being picked up from home by one of the other mums. But Sally can't remember the timings. *Four or four thirty?*

'Don't you like it?' Amelie turns to check her reflection in a mirror on the shop wall, holding the dress against her body and tilting her head.

'It's very nice but we've really got to go. Come on. Put it back.' Sally frowns. Pick-up time is four. They're even more pushed than she feared. Sally starts leading the way through the central aisle of Freda's Fashions. It's on Maidstead High Street, half an hour from home on a good day. But it's not a good day.

Tuesday afternoon. Big crowds. Half-term traffic. They've been in town for a birthday present. Sally bought Amelie a new outfit *last* week and no way is she getting another one today. She turns to find her daughter hasn't moved. 'Come on, Amelie. Put it back.'

A woman in a black mac turns as Sally raises her voice. Sally feels a momentary sweep of guilt. The green actually looks very nice against Amelie's dark hair but that's not the point.

'I want to try it now, Mummy. *Please.*'

'I told you. We don't have time. Put it back.' Sally is aware of the woman in the black mac still watching them, eyebrows raised now. She wishes she could tell her to mind her own. *You try getting a wilful eight-year-old in and out of town inside an hour.*

At last Amelie puts the dress back on the rail, huffing her disapproval and following Sally, head down.

'We'll come back another day.'

'Yeah. *Sure* we will.'

'Enough of the attitude. I wanted to come into town yesterday for the present, remember. You were the one who left this until the last minute. Now come on. Let's get going.' Sally keeps marching the length of Freda's Fashions and through the front doors where her phone rings.

Sally stands still, Amelie a step behind, just in front of the shop. The screen confirms it's Laura. The mum doing the party run. 'I need to take this, Amelie. It's about your lift. Wait there. I need a better signal.' Amelie rolls her eyes, folds her arms and leans back against one of the doors, right knee bent, foot flat against the central pane of glass.

Sally takes a few paces until two bars emerge. 'Hello, Laura. I'm in town. Running late.'

'Sorry, doll. Emergency here. Turned my ankle. Can't drive.'

Much later with the police, Sally will say she was on the phone for just a few minutes. But this will turn out not to be true. The reality is she's drawn into the logistical nightmare of being asked to step up as eleventh-hour party taxi to four girls across the South Hams, juggling a myriad of

WhatsApp messages about who to pick up from where. And warning everyone she's running late . . .

By the time she turns to check if Amelie's still in her strop, the doorway to Freda's Fashions is empty.

No Amelie.

Sally frowns. She glances around, looking for Amelie's bright pink hoodie. No sign along the High Street. She walks back into the shop as a new thought lands. She hurries right through the central aisle to the changing rooms at the back. There's just one curtain closed, and she swishes it open, fully expecting it to be Amelie with the dress.

'*Excuse me!*' An older grey-haired woman in her underwear stares daggers.

'I'm so sorry. I'm looking for my daughter.'

Sally retreats to double-check the other cubicles. Empty. She walks around the rest of Freda's Fashions but there's no sign of Amelie anywhere. A wave of cold now passes right through her.

Next door there's a bakery cum café. Maybe Amelie needed the toilet? She's not supposed to go to the toilet on her own but she's in a mood, remember.

Sally checks the three cubicles in the café's restroom. Also empty. The wave of cold turns to something else. A dread she for some reason recognises . . .

The next few minutes spiral into a blur. Sally marches from shop to shop, casting around for a flash of pink and calling Amelie's name over and over. Finally she loops back to Freda's Fashions and clutches an assistant's sleeve.

'Have you seen a girl in a pink hoodie? Dark hair. Aged eight but tall.' She signals Amelie's height with her hand. 'Looks more like nine.'

'No. Sorry. Do you want us to—'

Sally doesn't let her finish. Suddenly can't seem to even hear properly. She turns and makes for the High Street again, calling Amelie's name much louder. *Amelie. Where are you?* She goes back in the café

next door. And the chemist. And the shoe shop. She trips on a step. People are starting to stare.

The panic now coursing through Sally is making her feel sick, and again she is conscious of the familiarity – this same nausea – and realises it's from a dream. Dreading this *very* thing happening. Yes. One of her nightmares . . .

'It's OK. We'll find her, love.' A stranger's voice. The tone is gentle, and Sally looks up to see a short woman in a stripy jumper leaning in towards her, then reaching to touch her arm. 'She's probably just popped into one of the other shops. My daughter does that all the time. Hides. Thinks it's funny. Might she have gone to the toilet?'

The woman's waiting for a reply but it's as if she's behind a screen. Two feet away but on the other side of some invisible, frosted glass. Voice dimmed. Image blurred. The stripes on her jumper *moving*.

'The toilet? Might she have gone to the toilet, love? We could check all the nearest loos—'

Sally is still feeling sick and closes her eyes to block the rolling stripes on the jumper. She tells the woman, eyes still clamped shut, that she's already checked the café toilets. 'She's eight. Dark hair. Pink hoodie . . .'

The woman offers to help search but Sally's voice out loud sounds strange now – echoey as if under water. And how can this woman help? She opens her eyes – *sorry, sorry* – and turns away from the stripes to keep marching from shop doorway to shop doorway – *Amelie. Are you in here?* – as she takes out her phone and tries Matthew's number. It clicks through to answerphone.

A couple more women start following Sally, offering to coordinate the search. They mutter about checking the whole High Street, shop by shop. *We need to be methodical*. And then another much taller woman in a red coat breaks away from the huddle to match Sally's strides, marching right alongside, asking if it's maybe time to call the police? She's calm, this woman. Practical. Voice steady. Eyes grave.

The woman lowers her voice and asks again, 'Do you think it's maybe time we called the police?'

Sally suddenly stops walking. Back straight. She realises in this instant, rock still with the blur of bright red alongside, that she should have done this already. She's not dialled 999 out of blind fear; not wanting to face it. The seriousness. Clinging instead to the life raft of hope that any second now there will be a happy ending – *There you are, lovely girl. I've been frantic.*

'How long's it been?' The woman in red again.

'Ten minutes. No—' Sally checks her own watch to see it's more than twenty. 'Much longer. I've been a bit all over the place—'

'Right. The police then? Yes? Just to be on the safe side?'

'Yes. Please call the police. Please do that now.' Sally feels her stomach surge again, afraid she's really going to be sick. Right here. 'I need to try my husband again.'

'OK.' The woman in red pulls out her own mobile from her pocket and starts to dial. 'Right. You phone home. I'll get help.' She turns to speak into her phone. '*Police please*' then back towards Sally as she waits. 'What's your daughter's full name? And do you have a picture if they ask?'

'Amelie Hill. Eight. She doesn't normally wander off.' Sally holds up her own phone for face recognition. 'It's been twenty minutes at least. Tell them it's serious. I'll sort a picture.'

Her phone opens. *Come on, come on.* She wonders as it rings if Matthew will blame her. As she in this moment blames him.

His number goes straight to answerphone again. Sally waits for the bleeps this time, nails pushed hard into her other palm. 'Amelie's gone missing. I've tried everywhere. The police are being contacted. I'm on Maidstead High Street. Just up from Boots. Call me.'

The woman on the phone to the police suddenly raises her hand for her attention. *Yes. I have the mother with me now.*

But Sally's mobile rings just as the woman in red steps closer. Sally signals that she needs to speak to her husband first.



‘Where on the High Street, Sal? I’m leaving now.’ Matthew’s trying to keep his tone steady. ‘How long’s she been missing? You sure she’s not just looking in a shop. Just—’

‘No, she’s gone, Matthew. *Gone*. I’ve looked everywhere. People are helping me. I’ve been looking for a while.’ She can feel both her hands starting to shake again. ‘I’m about to speak to the police.’

‘Dear God. OK. I’ve got this. I’ll call Mel. Stay on the line—’

‘I’m sorry. I can’t. I need to speak to the police right now.’

She rings off to take the stranger’s mobile. Her voice robotic as she shares more details, answers the questions, imagines the police form being filled out, all the while the echo of voices all round still calling her daughter’s name. A bigger crowd gathering now. Some of them wanting to help. Some just standing, gawping. A few holding their own children just that little bit closer. Toddlers bundled back into pushchairs. The paranoia like a cancer. Straps strapped. Babies held tight.

‘They’re on the way,’ Sally says, handing the phone back to the woman. ‘They say to wait here. Do you mind waiting with your phone? They’re going to ring again in a minute. They wanted my number but I went blank. I’ll give it to them when they ring back. Sorry. Stupid of me—’

‘It’s fine. I’ll wait with you. Hold on to my phone. Now – we need to get you somewhere to sit down. A hot drink. Can someone get a drink?’ The practical woman, the kind, middle-aged woman, back straight, is widening her eyes at the group, glancing about and then back at Sally. ‘You drink tea? Yes?’

Sally nods and a man signals that he’ll fetch the drink. ‘With sugar,’ adds the woman in red, and next she’s steering Sally by the arm towards a bench near a department store. ‘You need to sit down. You look very pale.’

As she allows herself to be guided to the bench, Sally realises just how capable this woman is and her kindness and steadiness are all at once both essential and unbearable. Sally’s legs seem to give way as she sits. The woman grips her arm tighter.

The stranger's phone suddenly rings in Sally's hand. A male voice. 'Hello. Is that Mrs Hill? I understand that your daughter Amelie is missing. I realise this must be very frightening but I promise that we're going to help you.'

'Thank you. My name's Sally Hill. My daughter's just eight and she never wanders off. *Never*. My husband, Matthew Hill, is ex job. A private investigator. He's recently agreed to rejoin the police force. There's been some media coverage. He's had some very difficult cases in the past, both in the force and as a private investigator. I've always worried something might happen' – she pauses – 'to our family.'

'And why's that, Mrs Hill?' His tone has changed. 'Have there been problems before? Specific threats?' A pause. 'Are you saying you think someone's taken Amelie? That she's been deliberately targeted?'

'I don't know. I don't know.' Sally says this to comfort herself. But it's a lie. Because she does feel that she knows. Deep down she fears that's *exactly* what's happened. For weeks and months she and Matthew have been arguing over whether it was safe for him to rejoin the police force. After the threat all those years ago. But mostly because of all the nasty letters every time he's in the papers . . .

Once upon a time it was Matthew who was afraid. She the one longing for a child. *We are allowed to be happy.*

And now?

Still she can hear the voices of strangers calling her daughter's name. And then come little dots of black on the periphery of her vision.

She tries to fight it – *not now, please not now* – but the dots grow bigger and the voice on the phone gets weaker. Distant. 'I'm sorry. But I'm feeling a bit faint—'

And then she's sinking. Falling. And all around her becomes a complete blur, the voices fading, as she spirals down. Deeper and deeper. The same words following her into the blackness.

*Amelie. Gone.*

This thing she's feared. Dreaded. Dreamt about. This thing she's known deep in her gut all along. His fault? Her fault?

How wrong she was to believe they were safe now.

Too late.

*Amelie is gone.*

## CHAPTER 2

### MATTHEW – DAY ONE

Matthew Hill dashes from the small flat adjoining his office back to his desk.

‘I’m sorry but I have a family emergency. I’m going to have to go. Reschedule this.’ He’s grabbing his jacket from the back of his chair as he speaks, checking the pocket for his car keys. His head says there will be an update any minute to say that Amelie has been found. Hiding. Pranking. *Sorry to panic you*. But his heart, pounding out of his chest, says he will *never* forgive himself if he’s wrong.

He has to go. *Now*.

But the girl doesn’t move.

‘What about my mother?’ she says. ‘Trying to find . . . *my . . . mother?*’

Her crestfallen expression underlines everything he suddenly realises is wrong with his life. Has *always* been wrong with his life? The push-pull of family versus work. The work as a PI always so full on.

The girl looks as if she may cry. She’s a mother herself, apparently, but looks too young. Nineteen. A kid with a kid. Her email said her mother left the family when she was eight and Matthew’s only had time to take the most basic of details.

‘I’m sorry but I really do have to go. I have your number and I promise I’ll update you as soon as I can. Either to fix another meeting or