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*THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN*

PAULA  
HAWKINS



A NOVEL

THE BLUE  
HOUR

ALSO BY PAULA HAWKINS

*The Girl on the Train*

*Into the Water*

*A Slow Fire Burning*

PAULA  
HAWKINS

*A Novel*

THE BLUE  
HOUR



DOUBLEDAY CANADA

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# Contents

*Also by Paula Hawkins*

*Copyright*

*Dedication*

*Epigraph*

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-One](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Four](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Five](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Six](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Eight](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Nine](#)

[Chapter Thirty](#)

[Chapter Thirty-One](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Two](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Three](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Four](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Five](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Six](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Eight](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Nine](#)

[Chapter Forty](#)

[Chapter Forty-One](#)



[Chapter Forty-Two](#)

[Chapter Forty-Three](#)

[Chapter Forty-Four](#)

[Chapter Forty-Five](#)

[Chapter Forty-Six](#)

[Chapter Forty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Forty-Eight](#)

[\*Acknowledgments\*](#)

[\*About the Author\*](#)

*For Mum and Dad, with love*

*And death shall have no dominion.  
Dead men naked they shall be one  
With the man in the wind and the west moon;  
When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,  
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;  
Though they go mad they shall be sane,  
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;  
Though lovers be lost love shall not;  
And death shall have no dominion.*

DYLAN THOMAS

*Life is short, the art long.*

HIPPOCRATES

The moon woke me, bright and close. It shed such a strange light over the sea, a dark kind of daylight, like looking at the negative of a photograph. I couldn't go back to sleep. I haven't been able to work for weeks, so I went down to the beach. I was barefoot and the sand was cold under my feet; it made me want to run.

There was a wind. Strangely warm, it made the sands shift, and the clouds passing over the moon threw shadows to chase me. I kept thinking of the song Grace taught me, the one about the wolves digging the newly dead from the sod, strewing their poor bones over the earth.

Lately, I've been feeling a bit savage myself.

I ran and ran until I had my feet in the water, and when I turned, I looked back at the island, at the house, at my bedroom window with the light still on, and I saw something move. The curtain, probably, but I felt chilled through. I watched and waited, willing him to appear again, but there was nothing, nothing and no one, only suddenly the water lapping at my calves, at my knees.

The sands weren't shifting any longer, I couldn't see the sand at all, everything was underwater, and I had so far to go. I tried to wade, as fast as I could, but the wind was against me and the tide was like a river. I kept stumbling, falling to my knees; the cold felt like a slap, like being hit, over and over.

I don't think I've ever felt terror like it.

By the time I got back to the steps I was so exhausted I could barely move. I lay there, shivering so violently it felt as though I were convulsing. Eventually I managed to get up, to climb to the house. I showered and dressed and went up to the studio and started to paint.

## Division II (circa 2005)

### **Vanessa Chapman**

Ceramic, urushi lacquer, gold leaf, gold filament, artiodactyl rib, wood, and glass

*On loan from the Fairburn Foundation.*

*One of just seven sculptures Chapman made combining ceramic pieces with found objects, Division II is a deceptively simple spatial device: a group of objects are arranged in relation to each other, suspended by wires, enclosed in a glass box.*

*In presenting these objects in this way, Chapman poses questions about inclusion and exclusion, about what we hide and what we reveal, where we are generous and where we are withholding, about what we make and what we leave behind.*

From: bjefferies@gmail.com

To: info@tatemodern.co.uk

Subject: Chapman—Sculpture and Nature exhibition

Dear Sir/Madam,

I very much enjoyed my visit to Tate Modern this weekend, in particular the *Sculpture and Nature* exhibition, which contained some wonderful pieces. I did, however, spot an error on the exhibit label of Vanessa Chapman's 2005 work, *Division II*, which listed artiodactyl rib among the materials. As a forensic anthropologist of many years' standing, I can assure you that the rib in the piece is not artiodactyl; it is in fact human.

I suspect that it is quite possible that Ms. Chapman herself made the error: to the untrained eye, the rib of a deer looks very similar to a human one.

I thought perhaps you ought to be made aware.

Yours sincerely,

Benjamin Jefferies

## ONE

In the chastening chill of a dazzling October morning, James Becker stands on a footbridge, hip hitched against the handrail, rolling a cigarette. Beneath him, the stream runs black and slow, the water close to freezing, oozing like treacle over rusty orange stone. This is the midpoint of his daily commute, which takes a full twelve minutes from the Gamekeeper's Lodge, where he lives, to Fairburn House, where he works. Fifteen minutes if he stops for a smoke.

Coat collar up, glancing quickly over one shoulder, he might appear furtive to an outsider, though he's no need to be. He belongs here, astonishing as that may be; even he can barely credit it. How can he—fatherless bastard of a supermarket checkout girl, state-school boy in a cheap suit—be living and working here, at Fairburn, among the blue bloods? He doesn't *fit*. And yet somehow, through hard work and dumb luck and only a minor bit of treachery, here he is.

He lights his cigarette and checks over his shoulder one more time, looking back at the lodge, warm light spilling from the kitchen window, turning the beech hedge golden. No one is watching him—Helena will still be in bed, pillow clamped between her knees—no one will see him breaking the promise he made to quit. He *has* cut down—to just three a day now—and by the time the water freezes, he thinks, he'll pack them in altogether.

Leaning back on the rail, he draws hard on his cigarette, looking up at the hills to the north, their peaks already dusted with snow. Somewhere between here and there a siren wails; Becker thinks he glimpses a flash of blue light on the road, an ambulance or a police car. His blood rushes and his head swims with nicotine; in his stomach he feels the faint but undeniable tug of fear. Smoking quickly, as though it might do less damage that way, he flicks

the dog end over the rail and into the water. He crosses the bridge and crunches his way across the frosted lawn toward the house.

—

THE LANDLINE IN his office is ringing when he opens the door.

“’Lo?” Becker jams the handset between his shoulder and chin, turns on his computer, and pivots, reaching across to flick the switch on the coffee maker on the side table.

There’s a pause before a clear, clipped voice says, “Good morning. Am I speaking with James Becker?”

“You are.” Becker types in his password, shrugs off his coat.

“Right, well.” Another pause. “This is Goodwin, Tate Modern.”

The phone slips from Becker’s shoulder; he catches it and presses it to his ear once more. “Sorry, who?”

The man on the other end of the phone exhales audibly. “Will Goodwin,” he says, his cut-glass vowels exaggerated by enunciation. “From Tate Modern in London. I’m calling because we have a problem with one of the pieces on loan from Fairburn.”

Becker stands to attention, his fist tightening around the handset. “Oh, *Christ*, you haven’t damaged it, have you?”

“No, Mr. Becker.” Goodwin’s tone drips restraint. “We have taken *perfectly good* care of all three of Fairburn’s pieces. However, we have had cause to withdraw one of the sculptures, *Division II*, from the exhibition.”

Becker frowns, sitting down. “What do you mean?”

“According to an email we received from a very distinguished forensic anthropologist who visited our exhibition this weekend, *Division II* includes a human bone.”

Becker’s burst of laughter is met with bottomless silence. “I’m sorry,” Becker says, still chuckling, “but that is just—”



“Well might you apologize!” Goodwin sounds murderous. “I’m afraid I do not share your amusement. Thanks entirely to your curatorial incompetence, in my very first exhibition as director and the museum’s very first post-pandemic show, we find ourselves in the position of having inadvertently displayed human remains. Do you have any idea how damaging this could be for us as an institution? It’s this sort of thing that gets people *canceled*.”

When finally Becker gets off the phone he stares at the computer screen in front of him, waiting for Goodwin to forward him the email. This complaint—if you can call it that—is obvious nonsense. A joke, perhaps? Or possibly a genuine mistake?

The message appears at the top of his inbox, and Becker clicks. He reads the message twice, Googles its sender (a well-respected academic at a major British university—an unlikely joker), and then clicks on ArtPro, Fairburn’s cataloging software, to search for the piece in question. There it is. *Division II*, circa 2005, by Vanessa Chapman. Color photographs, taken by Becker himself, illustrate the listing. Ceramic, wood, and bone, suspended by filament, float around each other in a glass case fashioned by Chapman herself. The ceramic and bone are identical twins: fragile spindles of pure white, fractured at their centers and bonded together with lacquer and gold.

The first time he saw it, he thought it must have been sent by mistake. Sculpture? Vanessa Chapman wasn’t a sculptor; she was a painter, a ceramicist. But there it was, beautiful and strange, a delicate enigma, the perfect puzzle. No explanatory note, only the briefest mention in a notebook, where Chapman talked about the difficulties she’d had putting together its *skin*, the glass box encasing the other components. Indubitably hers then, and now his. His to research, to catalog, to describe and display, to introduce to the world. It was shown, briefly, at Fairburn House and since then has been viewed by thousands of people—tens of thousands!—on loan at galleries in Berlin and Paris and, most recently, London.

A human bone! It’s *absurd*. Pushing his chair back from his desk, Becker gets to his feet, turning to face the window.

His office is in the public wing of the house, looking out over the east quad. At the center of a lawn as neat and green as baize stands a Hepworth bronze, its curves burnished by morning light, the sloping convex walls of the hollow at its heart shimmering green. Through that oval space, Becker spies Sebastian striding quickly across the grass, his phone pressed to his ear.

Sebastian Lennox is the heir to Fairburn—once his mother shuffles off, Sebastian will own this house, the lodge Becker lives in, the quad, the Hepworth, and the fields beyond. He is also director of the foundation, so not only Becker’s landlord but his boss, too.

(And his friend. Don’t forget that.)

Becker watches as Sebastian skirts the bronze, his smile a little *too* wide, his laugh audible even at this distance. Becker turns slightly, and the movement catches Sebastian’s eye; he squints, raising one hand in salute, and spreads his fingers wide, indicating *five*. Five minutes. Becker steps away from the window and sits back down at his desk.

Ten, fifteen minutes later, he hears Sebastian’s footsteps in the hall, and a moment after that Sebastian bounds into the office, a golden retriever in human form.

“You’re not going to *believe* the call I just had,” he says, pushing a hank of blond fringe from his eyes.

“It wasn’t from Will Goodwin, was it?”

“God, yes!” Sebastian laughs, collapsing into the armchair in the corner of Becker’s office. “Wetting himself about getting canceled. He called you, too, then?”

Becker nods. “They’re withdrawing the piece from the exhibition,” he says. “It’s...it’s a total overreaction—”

“Is it?”

Becker spreads his palms wide. “Of course it is! It has to be. The piece has been viewed by God knows how many people, including experts. If the bone were human, I think someone would have spotted it by now.”

Sebastian nods, his mouth turning down at the corners.

“You’re *disappointed*?” Becker asks, incredulous.

Sebastian shrugs. “It might have escaped your notice, Beck, but the great British public haven’t exactly been beating down our doors since we reopened...I thought maybe the suggestion of a mystery, a whiff of scandal...”

“Scandal? Oh, I like the sound of that.” The two men turn to see Helena standing in the doorway. She is clad from her chin to her ankles in black cashmere, a ribbed dress that hugs her neat bump. Wisps of chestnut hair have escaped her ponytail, and there are bright spots of color across her cheekbones. She’s slightly out of breath.

“Hels!” Sebastian leaps to his feet, embracing her, kissing her gently on both cheeks. “Radiant one. Did you walk over? Come in, sit!”

Helena allows herself to be guided to the armchair Sebastian has just vacated. “I fancied a little walk,” she says, smiling at Becker, who’s regarding her quizzically. “It’s so beautiful out, what I’d really love is to go for a ride, but”—she wafts a hand in the air, preempting Becker’s objections—“I’m obviously not going to do *that*. So tell me, what’s all this about a scandal?”

She listens attentively as Becker explains, interrupting when he gets to the punch line. “But that piece was on display at the Berlinische Galerie! It was in the *Twenty-One* show at the Musée d’Art Moderne in Paris!”

Becker nods. “That’s exactly what I said.”

“So...what are you going to do?”

Sebastian perches on the edge of Becker’s desk. “No idea,” he says. “To be honest, I’m not entirely sure I see what the fuss is about. Say the bone is human. It’s not likely she robbed a grave, is it? Does it *really* matter?”

Becker bites the inside of his cheek. “You can’t just display human remains, Seb.”

“The British Museum is full of them!”

“Well, yes.” A smile breaks across Becker’s face. “But I think this is a bit different.”

Sebastian turns to him and scowls. “Well, Goodwin agrees. He’s having kittens; he wants to send the piece to a private lab for testing, on the QT, you know—”

“Absolutely *not!*” Becker leaps to his feet, jolting the desk as he does so, knocking coffee onto its fine green leather surface. Sebastian and Helena watch as he frantically mops up the spill with a handful of tissues. “To test the bone, they have to break the glass case and the case is part of the piece. She made it herself. If you break the glass you...well, I should think you invalidate the insurance at the very least, but more than that you damage the work. They’re not sending it off to some...*random laboratory* with no knowledge of its history and no expertise in this area.”

“OK,” Sebastian says, shrugging extravagantly. “Well. What, then?”

“We could start by asking someone else, some other expert, perhaps even a couple of experts, to take a look at it. Just a *look*, through the glass. And while that’s going on, we could talk to our insurers, explain the situation, explain that there might be need for...” He doesn’t want to say *testing*, doesn’t want to concede that point. “For further *investigation* somewhere down the line.”

“And in the meantime,” Helena says, crossing and uncrossing her legs, “you could go and talk to Grace Haswell.”

“No,” Becker says, stifling a thrill of excitement, “I can’t. I don’t want to leave you...”

“In my enfeebled condition?” Helena laughs. “Yes, you can. Come on, Beck, you’ve been dying to get out to Eris; you talked of nothing else during lockdown. And now here’s the perfect opportunity. The perfect excuse.”

“I suppose,” Becker says carefully, “I could leave early, nip up, and get back in a day...”

He glances at Sebastian, who shrugs. “I don’t mind. Go if you think it’ll be helpful. Not sure how the Wicked Witch of Eris Island is going to help with this, though? Unless you think she’ll know something? Perhaps the bone’s the last remains of one of the children she’s lured to her gingerbread house?” Sebastian laughs at his own joke. Helena winks at Becker. *Idiot*. “No, it’s a good idea. It is. You could kill two birds with one stone—clear up this bone business and let her know in person that we’re sick of her foot-dragging. It’s time she handed over Chapman’s papers, along with anything else that