

SOPHIE  
CAMERON

WHERE  
THE  
TIDE  
LINES  
LEAD

LITTLE TIGER  
LONDON





# BEFORE

## ONE



Another kid went missing on the first day of August. That made seven. Three boys, four girls. All vanished, like drops of water evaporating into hot air. All just ... gone.

I was at the beach when I heard the news. Everyone on the island has a whole collection of where-were-you-when stories from this summer. The first time it happened, I was playing Xbox at Carlos's house when his older sister went to join a search party for a tourist who had disappeared. Another time, my dad's assistant burst into our villa while we were having breakfast, his face as pale as my mum's egg-white omelette, and stammered something about guests who couldn't find their son.

But that Friday I was at the beach, watching my friends leap into the water.

"I'm going to try a backflip again." Adri pulled himself on to the wall and pushed his wet hair out of his face. "This is the one. I can feel it."

We were at our usual spot, the stone wall that rose above the water on the west side of the beach. Above us, the sky was the exact shade of my favourite oil paint, manganese blue. Adri took a breath, positioned himself on the edge of the wall – then tripped over the back of his flip-flop and fell into the water with his arms flailing.

Carlos, Luca and I all cracked up laughing. Adri had been trying to do a backflip all summer, and every attempt was a massive fail. He broke through the surface a moment later, red-faced and coughing.

“Nice one,” I shouted down to him. “Do you think you’ll be ready for the 2028 Olympics, or are you going to leave it until 2032?”

Luca scoffed. “Go on then, Elio. You show us how it’s done.”

I kept my smile still, but my fingers gripped the edge of the wall. I was born on the island, but I’d never liked the sea much. I fell over the side of a yacht when I was two and almost drowned, so it was probably because of that. Or maybe it was in my genes; my parents both grew up in the French Alps, hundreds of miles from the ocean. The drop down from the wall was only a few metres, but I’d never done it. To me, it would have been like leaping off the edge of a skyscraper.

Carlos stretched out his leg and kicked Luca in the shin. “Let’s see yours first.”

I let out a breath and relaxed my hands. Luca turned round, bent his knees, then sprung up and spun backwards into the water. His light brown hair almost brushed the stone on the way down, and I wondered what we'd do if he cracked his head open. There was no phone signal at the beach. All the restaurants and *chiringuitos* were closed that summer, and there was hardly anyone around – just a few old ladies sitting on folding chairs further along the shoreline, and some people from the sailing club tugging a Zodiac towards the water.

“It’s so weird, seeing it this quiet,” Carlos said, as if he’d read my mind. “Doesn’t feel like August.”

Any other year, the beach would be packed on a day like this. Tourists sizzling like strips of bacon on the sand, their kids splashing in sun-cream-streaked water. People selling lukewarm beers and dodgy sandwiches from picnic coolers, and club promoters sweating in stupid outfits handing out half-price tickets to events we were too young to get in to. The beach was never normally so deserted until November or December, after the season had ended and the last tourists had gone home. But this summer hadn’t been a normal summer.

“Come on, Carlos.” Luca’s shorts puffed out around his legs like neon-yellow jellyfish as he treaded water. “If Elio’s too chicken to jump, it’s your turn.”

Carlos walked to the highest point of the wall, his arms stretched out for balance. For years, he'd been the shortest of us four – so much smaller that people used to think he was Adri's younger brother. But over the last year he'd grown loads, all skinny limbs and bony joints. From where I sat, his dark curls blocked out the sun and turned his body into an almost-silhouette, outlined in gold.

Before he could jump, there was a noise in the distance. A voice, then multiple. They leaked through the pine trees bordering the beach, drifted over the sand and into the coves. They were shouting the same thing over and over; a sound that grew louder and morphed into a word.

A name.

We all knew what that meant, but Carlos said it first. "Another one."

Three police officers appeared at the end of the path. The old ladies twisted their heads round like owls. One cop went to talk to them, another to the people from the boat club. The third officer saw us watching and jogged across the sand towards the wall. He was one of the older brothers of Maria Riera, a girl in our class – Ramón or Raúl, I didn't know which.

"We're going to have to ask you to move, boys," he called up to us. "We're closing off the entire coast for an investigation."

Luca climbed out of the water and reached for his

backpack. “There’s been another one, hasn’t there?”

Ramón-or-Raúl paused, weighing up how much to tell us. As if the news wouldn’t have already split into a flock of different rumours and gone flitting around the island, landing in every single house by sunset.

“A Dutch tourist has been reported missing,” he said after a moment. “A girl. Her parents only noticed that she wasn’t in her room half an hour ago, so it might be nothing. Hopefully she’ll turn up soon.”

The cops had said the same thing about all the other kids at first: that they’d probably got lost in the hills, or slipped in the coves and been injured, or run off with some other tourist for a summer romance. But it had been weeks, months for some of them, and not a single missing person had been found.

Adri reached for his T-shirt and pulled it on. It was late afternoon, still hot, but goosebumps had rippled across his arms.

“What do you *really* think happened to her?”

That was the question the whole island had been asking. The whole world, even. Extra officers had been flown over from Madrid and Barcelona, and the countries the tourists came from had sent their own detectives to help, but still no one had found anything. There were usually a few sightings, a bit of CCTV footage, sometimes a trace of the missing person’s DNA,

and then nothing. The chief of the island's police was called José Antonio Iniesto, and the Spanish press had nicknamed him Capitán Inepto – 'Captain Useless'.

Raúl-or-Ramón grimaced. He looked a lot like Maria when he did that. They had the same thick eyebrows and pale, straight lips. Serious, unsmiling faces. Serious, unsmiling people.

"We don't know yet," he said. "But remember, this might not be like the others. It could be something different, or it could be nothing at all. We can't make any assumptions."

He told us to call the station straight away if we saw or heard anything that might be useful, reminded us that the 11 p.m. curfew was still in place for under eighteens, then jogged off to help his colleagues look for the missing girl. None of us said anything for a moment. The atmosphere had gone fog-thick, like a storm was brewing behind the bright blue sky.

"Another one," Carlos said again. Because we all knew that's what was going on, and Raúl-or-Ramón did too. Whatever had happened to those six other kids, wherever they were now, this Dutch girl had gone to join them.

Across the beach, the police officers kept shouting her name. It sounded a bit like the English word 'break'. *Break*, the sound of a family cracking into a before and after. *Break, break*, like this strange August, our island, a whole season shattered.