



Where
the
Light
Goes



SARA BARNARD

WALKER
BOOKS

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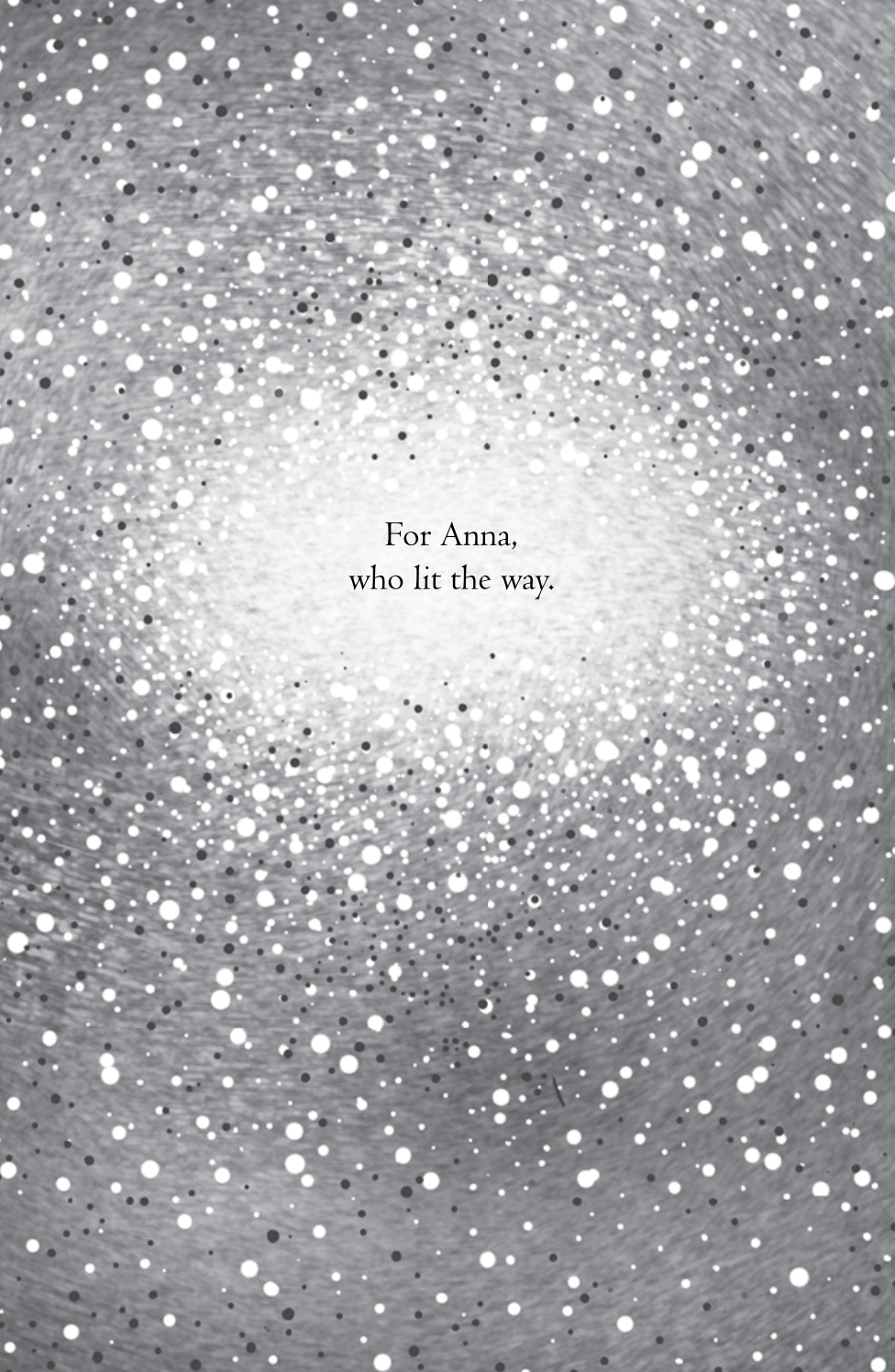


A Note on Content

This book addresses the grief that arises from the loss of a loved one who has died by suicide.

Please be aware that the following pages therefore contain discussions of – and references to – suicide, grief and related issues throughout.

A list of further resources is available at the back of this book.



For Anna,
who lit the way.

Imagine you pick up the phone. The house phone, the one you don't usually bother picking up because why would anyone call you on the house phone, but it's weirdly early for anyone to be calling, and you're the only one up, standing in your kitchen, barefoot, eating toast, so when the phone rings you lean over and answer it.

Imagine you do that, just answer the phone. It's a Tuesday morning in June, days into what promises to be a long, lazy summer. Your exams are over, and so is the stress. You should have chosen a better breakfast in celebration; something with chocolate, or some kind of syrup. When you answer the phone, that is what you're thinking about.

Imagine that phone call is about to change your whole world, but you don't know it right up until it happens. Your whole life is about to stop making sense. Everything coherent and logical and linear is about to collapse.

Imagine you pick up the phone and your life and your world and everything you've ever known

into

hundreds and thousands

(of thousands of thousands)

of

P

i

e

c

e

s

GONE

The End – Tuesday

11.39 am

Andrew Saul @AndySaulJourn

BREAKING Lizzie Beck dead. More to come.

@frranchez Wtf???

@louise41stone No way

@rainbowm00n Fuck, no

@stanleybulldog Um, SOURCE?

@wesleyfred4ever Got to be a hoax. She's 21. Verify or GTFO

[SEE MORE REPLIES]

12.46 pm

Breaking News UK @breakingnewsofficial

Lizzie Beck, member of British girl band The Jinks, has died at the age of 21, her family confirms.

@jonestim97 Shiiiiit did she kill herself then?

@wiseoldferret Well she didn't die of old age, did she?

TRENDING IN UNITED KINGDOM

#1 Lizzie Beck

TRENDING WITH RIPLizzie, RIPLizzieBeck

849K TWEETS

@kerrysouthlee Shit this is so horrible, so sad. RIP Lizzie Beck.

@nigestopshome Fuck, it's true about Lizzie Beck? That poor girl. 21 is nothing at all.

@forthehijinks Can't even type. Devastated. Fuck this world.
#RIPLizzie

@thisjinksgirl What happened though?? Loads of people saying must be suicide but do we actually know that yet?
#LizzieBeck

@balebefore Drugs, I reckon. Wasn't she in rehab like twice? #LizzieBeck

@lincolnlodger Or murder. Wasn't her body found at Leo Peters' house?

@balebefore Er... are you accusing someone of murder, mate?

@lincolnlodger Just asking a question. Mate.

@jonhawl33 Brass neck of the lot of you pretending you give a fuck about Lizzie Beck now she's dead

@backtoparris Can everyone just stop all the speculation? Think of her poor family. #RIPLizzie

TWEETS I DIDN'T SEND

(Even though I scrolled through Twitter for hours and read every single tweet I could find.)

Her name is Beth.

Her name is Beth.

Her name is Beth.

Her name was Beth.

WHAT I DO THE DAY OF MY SISTER'S DEATH

- Scream
- Cry
- Scream and cry and scream and cry
- Lie on the floor in my mother's arms while we both wail
- Watch my father's feet as he puts his boots on and leaves the house to go and do things the father does when his daughter has been found dead
 - Words like "identify"
 - And "coroner"
 - And "inform"
- Brush my teeth
- Listen to my mum making call after call to everyone we love, frantic and calm at the same time – very weird – because this has to be done fast fast fast before someone who loved Beth – really loved Beth, not *Lizzie Beck* – finds out that she's dead from a tweet
 - She says, "It's Beth"
 - She says, "She's gone"
 - Or "She's passed"
 - Or "We've lost her"
 - Or "She's ... yes..."
 - She doesn't say, "She's dead"
 - And she definitely doesn't say, "She killed herself"
 - But even though she doesn't say the words, she still tells them, somehow, and when she hangs up, I know they know
 - She turns and sees me
 - She says, "Oh, Emmy." Just that, nothing else

- Watch from my window as the journalists gather outside our house, knock on our door, stand in clusters on our driveway
- Hide in my room
- Open Twitter, wait for the storm to break
 - Watch the first tweet come in, the second, the third
 - Then 100, 1000, too many to count
- Scroll
- Scroll
- Scroll
- Ignore the WhatsApp notifications as they start filling my phone screen, the people I love, the people I should have told already but haven't, because to be honest I forgot that they exist, that there is anything but this shock, this grief, this pain
 - My best friend, my boyfriend
 - Who are still here, who love me
- Turn off my notifications
- Hear people in my house, more wailing (women) and talking (men)
- Go downstairs and see pizza boxes
 - Mum says I have to eat something so I
- Pick all the pepperoni slices off an entire pizza and eat them one by one
 - Then I am sick
 - And I cry some more
 - Ask who the man standing outside our door is (*a security guard*)
 - Ask who sent us a security guard (*the band's management*)
 - So quickly? (*it had to be quick, the journalists – if you can call them that – are ruthless*)
 - Why do we need a security guard? (*oh, Emmy, I can't – please, I can't deal with questions right now, I—*)
 - Security from what? (*from . . . the noise*)
- Leave Mum in the kitchen so I don't have to see her break down again
- Watch the six o'clock news

- “Good evening. Lizzie Beck, member of British girl band The Jinks, has died. She was twenty-one.”
- A clip of the first “Great British Sounds” audition, the sound fading as the colour turns to black and white
- A live reporter outside Leo Peters’ house, telling the world that this is where her “body” was “found”, as if this information is relevant or necessary
- A series of tributes from people all over the music industry, talking about how “devastating” it is, how “tragic”, “what a loss”, “what a talent”, these people who never defended her when she was alive to hear it
 - I can’t bear it
 - I can’t bear it
- Cry
- Cry
- Cry

MY SISTER IN NUMBERS

Instagram followers: 5.1M

Twitter followers: 689,923

Years on this earth: 21

Years of celebrity: 5

“Last warnings” from management: 4

BRIT awards: 3

Stints in rehab: 2

Little sisters: 1

MY SISTER IN WORDS

Talentless

Embarrassing

Shameful

Spirited

Talented

Sad

Wild

Junkie

RIP

Bold

Slut

Troubled

Tragic

Beautiful

Shameless

Heartbreaking

Attention whore

I can hear my mother crying somewhere in the house.

My dad's low voice.

This is our family now. The three of us.

For as long as I can remember, our family was

Beth at the centre and us in her orbit.

Satellites to the star.

And now there's just ...
darkness.

Except there's not. (I tell myself this.)

Because we're still alive, which means there's tomorrow.

For us, there's tomorrow.

1 DAY GONE
Tomorrow (morning)

Wednesday 13th June 2018

issued 7am

Official statement from The Jinks

We are utterly devastated at the loss of our friend, bandmate and sister, Lizzie Beck. We are focusing on supporting each other and Lizzie's family during this dreadful time. We are so thankful for the support and love that is being shown to all of us by our fans - we love you all so much and we're so grateful. As we're sure you can understand, we as a band are going to take some time to grieve, comfort each other and try to come to terms with this tragedy. We ask that the press and the public respect our privacy - and especially the privacy of Lizzie's family - at this time. We are heartbroken.

Lizzie, we love you, and we will miss you every day.

Jodie, Aiya and Tam

THE JINKS

LIES. ALL LIES.

Wednesday 13th June 2018

issued 7am

Official joint statement from Electric Records, Skyscape Management, and NorthWest Entertainment

The death of Lizzie Beck has come as a tremendous shock to everyone who has worked with, nurtured and supported Lizzie and The Jinks over the past five years. Our deepest condolences and thoughts are with her family and friends. We are focused now on supporting Lizzie's bandmates, Jodie Soto-Hahn, Aiyana Mehta and Tamryn Lord, and providing whatever assistance we can to her family during this unimaginable time. The planned relaunch of the band has been postponed indefinitely, and all booked engagements, including interviews of any kind, have been cancelled.

For all press enquiries, please contact Melissa Sandford, publicist, at melsandford@electricrecords.co.uk

SELF. SERVING. LIES.

It wasn't official yet, oh no. Because Beth FOUGHT. She wasn't going to roll over and let them steal her band from her, kick her to the kerb like a dog.

It had been all negotiation and ultimatums and promises. She would have won them round, I know it.

Now they've got what they wanted, haven't they? And even better, they got what they wanted without any nasty headlines about them, no trolling on social media about how pathetic they are, no chink in their armour of being THE GOOD ONES in the band while Beth soaked up all the hate, all the abuse.

Now she's gone and they get to be sad.

They get to say they're "sorry" but not for what they should be sorry for.

They get to say they loved her.

They get to call her their sister.

She wasn't your sister.

She was mine.

I say to Dad, “Can they do that?”

“Do what?”

“Pretend none of it happened? Them trying to get rid of Beth?”

A look on his face like he’d swallowed pain. “Not now, Emmy.”

“It’s not right.”

“It’s business. It’s the music industry.”

“You think it’s OK?”

“I don’t think they should start sharing their dirty secrets with the world, no. I don’t see what that would achieve.”

“But Beth—”

“There’s no need to taint the band,” he says. “There’s still a chance they could carry on without her. Why deny them that?”

Me, speechless. My head going, *Carry on without her. Carry on without her. Carry on without her.*

Unthinkable. Monstrous.

Dad is still talking. “Do you really want the world to know that Beth had been thrown out of the band? Do you think that would make her look good?”

“It’s the truth.”

“Em.” Gritted teeth, eyes closing for too long. Breath in through his flared nostrils, like a horse. He says quietly, “There’s a lot you don’t understand.”

And isn’t that the truth.

His eyes open and he looks at me, sudden and piercing. “You haven’t posted about this, have you?”

“What do you mean, ‘posted’? *Online?* Of course not!”

“Good. Don’t.”

“I know that!” How can he think I need to be told this? The number one rule in the world of the famous is “no comment”. Literally, don’t comment. Don’t say it in a phone call, don’t post it on the internet. Don’t risk exposing secrets, don’t tell anyone your feelings, just don’t say a word.

I was eleven when Beth got famous, and sometimes my parents act

like I'm still that young. Like I'm not sixteen, like I'm not literally a student at Shona Lee School for the Performing Arts, where learning things like this is basically part of the curriculum.

Beth did it too. Coddled me.

"Have you posted *anything*?" Dad asks.

"No, Dad!" And what would it matter if I did, anyway? All my accounts are private.

"Good," he says again. He hesitates, then shakes his head, sighing. "Thank you," he adds, quietly. "I know I don't have to worry about you. You're a smart girl."

Maybe this should feel good, but it doesn't. It just makes me think of how Beth used to pour seemingly every innermost thought onto the internet for the world at large to feed on, how she was a lot of things but never smart in the way Dad wanted her to be, how he did have to worry about her, all the time, and how there will never be a post from her ever again. Her last post already exists, and I know what it is, but when I think about it my entire heart convulses with pain.

"Thank you," Dad says again.

Dad is part of The Jinks' management team.

Before, he was an IT consultant for a water company. Before that, before Mum and then Beth and then me, he was in a band called Owlface. They played weddings and corporate gigs and never had a record deal. He became the unofficial manager for The Jinks before their "Great British Sounds" audition. When they won and got big, they also got a team of managers, and Dad, now official, got a salary.

A big one.

(Bigger than the band got.)

He was part of the reason they couldn't just get rid of Beth from the band without a fight. Dad fought for her. (And his job.)

Now I don't know what there is left to fight for, but he's still fighting.

Obituary

Lizzie Beck

Lizzie Beck, founding member of “Great British Sounds”-winning girl band The Jinks, has died aged twenty-one after taking her own life.

A young star of the British music industry, Beck co-founded The Jinks aged just fifteen with best friend Jodie Soto-Hahn and their two friends Aiyana Mehta and Tamryn Lord. The band won the hearts of viewers and topped the popular vote in the high-profile BBC1 talent show less than a year later. The Jinks’ subsequent string of hit singles cemented Beck’s fame, while her straight-talking attitude earned her infamy in numerous tabloids.

From the outset, Beck attracted the most press and social media attention of all the bandmates, quickly forming a reputation for being outspoken and, occasionally, outrageous. Her response to “Great British Sounds” judge and industry legend Ricardo Patmore – who criticized the band during the show’s semi-final for wearing “distractingly revealing clothes” – “Dude, we’re sixteen, that’s on you” was one of the show’s most memorable moments, and remains a favourite meme in certain feminist circles five years on.

The Jinks secured their win despite resistance from within the competition and the wider music industry, and amid calls to drop the group entirely in favour of a performer deemed more suitable for “The BBC Proms”, where the show’s winners were scheduled to perform as part of the prize. Unbowed by this

pressure and perhaps boosted by the ensuing controversy, The Jinks' fame only grew after winning the show, bucking the trend of talent show winners fading into obscurity, with three number one singles and a number one album in just eighteen months. They also won three BRIT awards, two of which were in recognition of their third and most successful single "Daylights", co-written by Beck and Soto-Hahn.

Despite the success of her musical career, Beck frequently garnered more headlines for her personal life, in particular for her relationship with TV personality Leo Peters, and also the reported frictions between members of The Jinks. Beck regularly addressed these stories on her own social media accounts, attracting millions of followers who enjoyed her candour. Despite being the source of frequent tabloid controversy, Beck was supported and beloved by loyal young fans, to whom she was known for being warm and responsive.

Off-screen, Beck struggled with her mental health, about which she spoke openly and frankly, most notably in the podcast "Mind & Soul", where she revealed she had been battling an eating disorder for several years, in addition to anxiety and depression. Beck also spent time in recovery for addiction and, after a second admittance to rehab last year, the band was placed on an indefinite hiatus. Recent reports in the press suggested that the band had reunited and were beginning to record new material.

She is survived by her parents, Ellen and Malcolm Beckwith, and sister.

**Elizabeth Jane Beckwith, known as Lizzie Beck, singer,
BORN 21st September 1996; DIED 12th June 2018.**

And sister.

It smarts. It stings. It aches.

But it's true.

I want to be more than that – I've always wanted to be more than that – but it's the truest thing about me.

And sister.

I don't even get a name.

But why should I?

Every trace of me is a trace of her.

And now she's

1 DAY GONE
Tomorrow (afternoon)

We've been assigned a Family Liaison Officer.

(Which until today I didn't know was a thing.)

Her name is DC Dhanji, but – she says – we can call her Sufiya.

Actually, what she says is, "Please, call me Sufiya."

Just like that – "Please".

Sufiya's job is to look after us, basically.

Explain difficult police stuff to us.

Be the *liaison* between us and the police while they investigate.

(Even though she is also a police officer, which is confusing.)

"Investigate what?" I ask.

I blurt it out, really. It comes out while she's mid-sentence, but she doesn't even flinch, just smiles kindly at me and explains – so gently – that in circumstances like these it's customary to have *an inquest*.

"What circumstances?" I ask.

Because my heart has started racing, because maybe this means it wasn't suicide, that everyone's got it all wrong, that Beth didn't do this to herself, that someone else, maybe, someone—

"When someone takes their own life," Sufiya clarifies. "This kind of inquest isn't about . . . finding fault. Or assigning blame, necessarily."

While she speaks, my heart is slowing, sinking, aching.

"We want to try to understand," she says.

"Didn't the obituary kind of sum it up?" I ask, and I can hear how my voice has turned cold and sarcastic, the way it's never been before.

Dad says, "Emmy."

Mum says, "Emmy."

Sufiya says, "Do you think it did?"

I don't say anything. Of course it didn't. It wasn't even close. It was like it was written by someone who'd read about Lizzie Beck on Wikipedia. Someone who didn't even know her actual name was Beth and, even if they'd been told, wouldn't care.

After a silence, Mum says, "Please, carry on, Sufiya."

Sufiya does. She tells us how an inquest works, how long it will take, what to expect. I try to listen, but I keep realizing that I haven't

taken in anything she's said. Maybe she can tell, or maybe she's just been doing this a long time, because after she's finished explaining coroner's court she turns back to me and says, "Emmeline. This is an incredibly difficult time for you. Please know that I'm here for you too."

She pronounces it "*Emma-line*" instead of how everyone else says it – Emm-ah-lynn – which shouldn't matter at all, but somehow does.

But then she says, "Is it OK if I call you Emmy?"

(And I'm distracted by a realization, which is:

Sufiya is the first person I've met in this new world where Beth is dead.

The first person who will only ever know me without her.

For the rest of my life, all the new people I meet will know not Beth, but the fact of her being dead.)

I almost want to say no, because how can I still be that person, Emmy, in this new life? How can that still be my name?

Maybe I should become an *Emma-line*. Someone new. Someone unfamiliar.

But I just say, "Sure."

I slip away and no one stops me.

Go into the bathroom and stare at myself in the mirror.

I still look the same. I don't even look as sad as I expected.

I look normal.

Beth and I never really looked the same, which used to bother me, because all I wanted in the world was to be her.

Now, I see her in my cheeks and my eyes and the way my chin curves.

I used to say, "I wish I was as pretty as you." And she'd say, "Oh, shut up, you're gorgeous."

I reach out to touch the mirror. My fingertips leave smudges on the glass.

When we were kids, Beth and I used to play the alphabet game constantly. We'd pick any topic – animals, songs, celebrities, food – but whatever it was, she always won.

Now she's gone and I've started playing the game by myself, in my own head, with her as a theme, like an obsessive intrusive thought sequence I can't shake off.

Like right now.

When I walk into Beth's room, it's like my head won't let me deal with the mindfuck that is *standing in my sister's room when my sister is dead so therefore is it still her room or is it just a room and oh god oh god she's dead she's dead* so instead it trips a switch and I almost *hear* the lilting pattern of the opener to the game in my head—

I walk into Beth's room and in it I find

- A armchair (inherited from Gran, a weird rusty orange colour, still with a Beth-shaped slouch in the cushions)
- B books (the same books she had when she was fourteen, none added or removed)
- C corkboard collage (of photos, mostly her and Jodie, some with Tam and Aiya too, all of them frozen in time as smiling fifteen-year-olds, lucky them)
- D dressing table (housing a haphazard collection of make-up and products, too many for her to keep track of, surely)
- E envelopes (stacks of, all addressed to her and unopened, piled up by her bed, Mum used to leave them there ready for when she next came home, which will now be never)
- F flowers (dried, pre-dating her death, a corsage from an awards ceremony she went to with Leo during one of their happy times)
- G guitar (her favourite thing, a present from Dad when she first formed the band, because – he said – *I know you're going to make it and you should have the best guitar*)
- H headphones (metallic red, noise-cancelling, the kind of expensive that made her say to me when they arrived, *Em, I totally bought these just to prove to myself that I could*)

- I iPod (extremely old, like *years* old, she was so proud of the fact that she still had it, that it still worked, she called it her time capsule of music)
- J jewellery tree (my gift to her on her birthday when she turned sixteen – it was hard to get presents for her because she could get anything she wanted herself)
- K keys (the keys to our house that she kept losing, so eventually Dad told her to stop taking them with her because of that time we got burgled and he was sick of having to change the locks, this was a big fight, one of their biggest, and I wonder if the keys abandoned on the desk have moved since then)
- L lanyards (too many to count, she used to collect them at the start of everything, I guess she stopped but I don't know when, didn't notice at the time until the time was already over)
- M moisturiser (the expensive kind that I didn't realize was expensive until I used it the whole time she was away once and she came home to find it empty and yelled at me that I was an annoying little freeloader, *get your own fame, get your own money, get your own sodding moisturiser*)
- N notebook (her lyric book, plain a4, night-sky-navy-blue front and back, unlined, I want to read it but can't even let myself touch it because what if all the answers are in there, what if they aren't)
- O Ormaie bottle (her perfume, if I pick the bottle up I can spray it and I'll smell her, right here, like she's in the room with me)
- P poster of The Jinks (that she put up on her wardrobe door as a joke when she was seventeen)
- Q quilt cover (bright yellow; a pure, rich, sunshine yellow)
- R rug (thick fake sheepskin, fluffy and cosy, where I used to sit or lie when Beth was home, watching her walk around the room in her underwear, face mask on, as she talked to me about the band, the road, Leo, everything)

- S Sebastien (cat, a pure white Norwegian Forest, Beth's Christmas present for the whole family the year after she got famous, but who was only ever her cat really, who loves to snuggle with her and purr whenever she's home, who is now sleeping on her bed, oblivious)
- T tiara (plastic with pink fake gems, a joke present from Jodie when they were thirteen that she wore that whole day at Thorpe Park and kept all the eight years since)
- U umbrella (gold, a prop from the first video The Jinks ever shot, an elaborate dance sequence in the rain)
- V Vans (collectible edition, Jinks-branded, from the Kaleidoscope era, bright colours inside jagged black lines, the word LIZZIE on the back of one, BECK on the other)
- W wardrobe (huge, walk-in, full of clothes that she will never wear again)
- X x...

I can't find an X, not anywhere in the room, and it feels like I've failed. Failed at some kind of superstitious checklist I was making, failed *her*. I cry over this missing X like it's actually a real thing instead of something I've invented that doesn't even matter. I sit down, heavy, on the bed, and Sebastien starts awake with a chirp of alarm.

I tell him, "Beth died."

He blinks, yawns, stretches.

"You'll never see her again," I say.

He arches his back, gives himself a shake, pads over to the end of the bed, away from me.

"It's not because she didn't love you," I say.

He looks back at me.

"I'm still here," I say.

Sebastien jumps off the bed with a graceful *whump*, leaves.

Silence.

"I'm still here," I say.

The other thing I don't find in that room.

Is a goodbye.

I know it's not there because I looked everywhere. Through the B for Books and E for Envelopes and W for Wardrobe and in the missing X that marks the lack of a spot where she thought of me, thought of us, thought to say goodbye before she left the world and me and us behind.

I think a part of me really thought it would be there, somewhere. That she would have left a message for me, something only I would be able to decipher, like what always happens in films after someone dies. A secret code. A treasure hunt. Just something. Anything.

But there's nothing.

A NOTE ON OUR HOUSE

(Which is to say, why we have our house,
which is to say, because of Dad's salary,
which is to say, because of Beth,
which is to say, because of *Lizzie*,
which is to say, the good things we have are because of her.)

After "Great British Sounds" and Beth's fame and Dad's salary, one of the first things my parents did was buy our house. This house.

We moved to a town in Surrey called Hethersett.

The kind of town that gets described as "leafy".

It's nice.

The house is big. You could fit our old house in it twice.

Four bedrooms, a sun room, a massive garden.

A study for Dad, a music room to fill with instruments.

(And a loft, airy and spacious, that we called *Lizzie's room*,
because we filled it full of *Lizzie* stuff.

So proudly. We were so proud.

I will not ever set foot in there again.)

We moved for the house, sure, but also for me.

So I could go to my new school.

Shona Lee.

(The performing arts school of my dreams.

Of *our* dreams, mine and Beth's, in the before-land.)

I left my whole life behind and didn't look back.

I think we all did that.

(Though maybe not as dramatically as Beth, suddenly famous.)

Beth was away most of the time and so
when we moved
we just packed up her room in the old house
and put it back together again in the new one.

She and Mum were planning to do it up properly.
Make it her perfect safe haven, Mum said.
But Beth dithered and procrastinated over paint colours and furniture
and then she started saying how
actually
she liked it that way.
Like a piece of her old life, she said.
It's already a haven, she said.

It became a relic, that room.
Partly because it was like a living snapshot of the past,
but also because she was hardly ever in it.
Beth was away all the time,
even though our home was still her home,
officially.

And it still is. (Was?)
Jodie, Aiya and Tam all own property of some kind,
all have their own flats.
It was just Beth who never got her act together.
Was never quite stable enough to make the leap.
Even though she always planned to move out,
get her own place somewhere in London.
("And, Em, you can come and stay all the time, yeah?")
There were always flats she was "planning" to "check out".
But it just ... never happened.

So, in a way,
even though she travelled the world,
she never really *left home*,
and now she never will.

That's kind of tragic, in a way.

But the most tragic thing –
at least for me –
is that even though this was her home, her haven, her safety,
this wasn't the last place she slept.
She died in Leo's bedroom.
Away from all of us.

Alone.

Grief is a scream you're living inside.

Relentless. So fucking loud.

But it's like no one else can hear it because they carry on talking like words still matter, making cups of tea, telling me to wash my hair, brush my teeth, eat some toast, how are you Emmy, how *are* you?

Those sympathy eyes.

And I want to say,

Can't you hear it?

It's so loud.

2 DAYS GONE

Other people

There is a shrine for Lizzie Beck outside Leo's house. Sprung up as if from nowhere, a sea of flowers and teddy bears. Cards, even letters.

It's fucking weird.

I mean, maybe the flowers I could understand, because that's what people do when someone dies – send flowers. (Or put them in a makeshift shrine on the side of the street, I guess.) (Even though, when you think about it, it's a bit obscene that we've made flowers a cultural thing to send or leave after someone's died. Like, sorry about that death you experienced. Here, have something beautiful to watch wither and die.)

But teddy bears? Beth was twenty-one.

And cards? Letters? To someone you didn't know? Who is literally dead?

Bizarre.

"Why is it there?" I ask Dad, because I can't say Leo's name. "Why not here, where she actually lived?"

Dad grinds his teeth so hard, his whole jaw judders. He says, quiet and tight, "It's where she died."

I look at pictures of the shrine online. I wonder what will happen to it when the news cycle moves on and people forget. What's going to happen to all those flowers? What if it rains?

I want to go and look at it, but my parents won't let me. Won't even consider it.

Some people – people who actually know us – have sent flowers too, but mostly it's cards ("Please let me know if there's anything I can do," they all say) and casserole dishes left with the security guard (still stationed outside our door during the day). Sometimes the dishes are still warm.

"I don't get it," I say, and Mum sighs.

"People want to be kind," she says, which is not the same as, *People are kind*.

There's not enough space in the fridge for all the casserole dishes. They pile up on the counter. I take one at random and go and sit in

the living room with it on my lap. I eat cold macaroni cheese with a spoon while I watch BBC Parliament, which I choose because it's so boring, and so distant from my own life, that I find it soothing.

The politicians keep calling each other "my honourable friend", even when they're on opposite sides and clearly loathe each other. It's the most British thing ever, and I find it weirdly fascinating. Like nothing in the world matters more than decorum.

It's how we are about death, isn't it? No one says what they really think – "I want to claw out my own heart to stop it hurting this much" – or does what they want to do (scream in the middle of the street). And everyone else turns away from it until they have no choice. They don't look you in the eye. They send delicious casseroles and cute teddy bears and beautiful flowers, because they need to believe that delicious and cute and beautiful still matter.

I used to believe those things mattered too.

But now Beth is dead, and I eat the macaroni cold.

It's been two days, and there are still so many articles.

So. Many. They just keep coming.

- *Lizzie Beck: British pop's latest tragedy*
- *TIMELINE: Lizzie Beck's final hours*
- *REVEALED: Drugs at home of Leo Peters where Lizzie Beck was found dead*
- *From reality TV to tabloid favourite: Lizzie Beck, a life in pictures*
- *What can we learn from Lizzie Beck's death?*
- *Lizzie Beck's death exposes the rot at the heart of our obsession with celebrity*
- *One thing is clear: we let Lizzie Beck down*
- *Lizzie Beck: a reckoning for reality TV*

(And always with that "we". Who is "we"?)

The same facts, over and over again. The same opinions too.

And so much detail, about everything. Details no one in the world needs to know, not even me. Especially not me.

It's grotesque.

And among the news articles there are the interviews and the features, the comments, the columns.

There's a feature on fans of The Jinks, how they feel. (Like it matters.)

There's a quote from one of them, saying,

"We've lost such a light."

And I think, no you haven't. You haven't lost anything.

And if you have lost a light, maybe you've lost a torch. A candle.

In a world with a thousand other torches. A million candles.

But there was only one Beth.

And that is who we've lost.

You didn't even know her name.

Thursday, June 14, 2018 at 10:30am

Subject: Love and condolences

From: Marianne Keane m.keane@shonalee.sch.uk

To: Emmeline Beckwith e.g.beckwith@shonalee.sch.uk

CC: Ellen Beckwith ellenbeckwith@outlook.com

Dear Emmeline,

I and everyone at Shona Lee was so very sorry to hear the news of your sister's passing. Please know that the love and best wishes of the entire student body – and staff – are with you and your family. If there is any way we can be of assistance, please do let us know.

Your audition to continue your time at Shona Lee and join the sixth form centre was scheduled for July 17th. Please be reassured that this requirement has been waived as per Shona Lee policy for students experiencing periods of bereavement or trauma. You are a much-valued member of the student body, as well as being an extraordinarily talented, conscientious and skilled performer. We will be delighted to welcome you back in September. If you could confirm your acceptance by the end of this month, I would be appreciative.

My sincere condolences to you and your family. We are thinking of you, Emmy.

With very best wishes,

Marianne Keane

Headmistress

Shona Lee School for the Performing Arts – *Exprimere ad somnia*

Rated "Outstanding"

I've never had an email from my school with the word "love" in it.

(It's weird.)

If Beth hadn't been famous, would I still have got an email like that?

It's really nice and everything, but is it also a bit . . . much?

I've never lost a sibling before, so I've got nothing to compare it to.

But it sort of feels like it's because Beth was Lizzie Beck, not because she was Beth.

And I hate that.

(So much.)

Which is probably ungrateful of me. It was a nice email. It's nice that they care about me.

And it's good that I don't have to audition for next year.

Because the thought of singing feels as suddenly alien to me as sprouting wings and flying away.

I haven't sung a note since Beth died,

and even though that's only three days, which maybe doesn't sound like much,

I used to sing constantly.

At school, with my friends, in the shower, in the garden, in my bedroom.

And with Beth, always with Beth.

(Sometimes, when she was bored, she'd send me a voice note of her singing the first line of a song we both loved, and I'd reply with me singing the next line, and we'd carry on until one of us got summoned; me to class, her to an interview or the microphone or somewhere else cool.)

Now, there's just silence.

The kind of silence with no room for music or joy or the planning of a life built on both.

* * *

But,

I love my school. I love my teachers. I love my friends.

Knowing I'll be going back to Shona Lee in September regardless – even though Beth will still be gone, even though my voice might have gone with her – makes something inside me calm a little.

Like maybe there's still a part of me that cares about my own life, and not just the fact that Beth isn't in it any more.

Like maybe this black hole of grief has an edge I'll reach one day,

and when I get there I'll be able to put my hand up,

and there'll be someone to

reach in,

take a hold,

pull me up.

My whole life, it's been music.

Every memory I have of my childhood has a soundtrack.

- Dad playing his guitar for Beth and me when we were tiny, Mum singing with her eyes closed, smiling
- Listening to the songs he played us on his record player with its crackly needle, how alight with happiness Dad's face was when we liked them too
- Sitting on the piano stool next to Beth, watching her hands move, trying to mimic her, the way Mum laughed when I got frustrated, how she said, "Be patient, Emmy! Your hands will grow!"
- Long car rides with the music playing – always playing – taking turns to choose the tape, then the CD, then the playlist
- Dancing to ABBA songs with Beth in the bedroom we once shared in our old house, wild and free, laughing, bouncing, jumping
- Singing "Top of the World" at my Auntie Char's wedding with Beth, her with a guitar in her twelve-year-old hands, feeling so grown up, so proud when everyone clapped for us, when one of the guests said to our parents, "They're very talented, aren't they?"
- How Dad said, "Oh yes, they're going to be stars, our girls."

Music is how I've always understood the world.

There was no happiness that couldn't be brought to life by a happy song.

No sadness that wasn't comforted by a sad song.

Not just listening to them, but playing them, singing them.

Music has always been what lifted me if I needed lifting,
carried me if I needed to sink.

The music has always been there – just like Beth was always there –
in me, and around me.

But now ... it's just *gone*, like it's been drained out of me.

Like it was never mine really, but hers,
and she took it with her when she went.

And now I'll have to live my life without a soundtrack
without a big sister leading the way
without anything it was meant to have.

Who *am* I now?

I try to sing, but nothing comes out.
I try to play my guitar, but my hands won't move.
I try to listen to music, but I have to turn it off.

The instruments in our music room lie still.
The piano lid closed.
No music comes drifting from the kitchen, the study.

Everything is silence.