



I KNOW
WHO
YOU ARE

A NOVEL

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING
AUTHOR OF *SOMETIMES I LIE*

I Know Who You Are

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For Jonny. Agents come in all shapes and sizes. I got the best.

Not everybody wants to be somebody. Some people just want to be somebody else.

One

London, 2017

I'm that girl you think you know, but you can't remember where from.

Lying is what I do for a living. It's what I'm best at; becoming somebody else. The eyes are the only part of me I still recognize in the mirror, staring out beneath the made-up face of a made-up person. Another character, another story, another lie. I look away, ready to leave her behind for the night, stopping briefly to stare at what is written on the dressing room door:

AIMEE SINCLAIR

My name, not his. I never changed it.

Perhaps because, deep down, I always knew that our marriage would only last until life did us part. I remind myself that my name only defines me if I allow it to. It is merely a collection of letters, arranged in a certain order; little more than a parent's wish, a label, a lie. Sometimes I long to rearrange those letters into something else. *Someone* else. A new name for a new me. The me I became when nobody else was looking.

Knowing a person's name is not the same as knowing a person.

I think we broke us last night.

Sometimes it's the people who love us the most that hurt us the hardest; because they can.

He hurt me.

We've made a bad habit of hurting each other; things have to be broken in order to fix them.

I hurt him back.

I check that I've remembered to put my latest book in my bag, the way other people check for a purse or keys. Time is precious, never spare, and I kill mine by reading on set between filming. Ever since I was a child, I have

preferred to inhabit the fictional lives of others, hiding in stories that have happier endings than my own; we are what we read. When I'm sure I haven't forgotten anything, I walk away, back to who and what and where I came from.

Something very bad happened last night.

I've tried so hard to pretend that it didn't, struggled to rearrange the memories, but I can still hear his hate-filled words, still feel his hands around my neck, and still see the expression I've never seen his face wear before.

I can still fix this. I can fix us.

The lies we tell ourselves are always the most dangerous.

It was a fight, that's all. Everybody who has ever loved has also fought.

I walk down the familiar corridors of Pinewood Studios, leaving my dressing room, but not my thoughts or fears too far behind. My steps seem slow and uncertain, as though they are deliberately delaying the act of going home; afraid of what will be waiting there.

I did love him, I still do.

I think it's important to remember that. We weren't always the version of us that we became. Life remodels relationships like the sea reshapes the sand; eroding dunes of love, building banks of hate. I told him it was over last night. I told him that I wanted a divorce, and I told him that I meant it this time.

I didn't. Mean it.

I climb into my Range Rover and drive towards the iconic studio gates, steering towards the inevitable. I fold in on myself a little, hiding the corners of me I'd rather others didn't see, bending my sharp edges out of view. The man in the booth at the exit waves, his face dressed in kindness. I force my face to smile back, before pulling away.

For me, acting has never been about attracting attention or wanting to be seen. I do what I do because I don't know how to do anything else, and because it's the only thing that makes me feel happy. The shy actress is an oxymoron in most people's dictionaries, but that is who and what I am. Not everybody wants to be somebody. Some people just want to be somebody else. Acting is easy; it's being *me* that I find difficult. I throw up before almost every interview and event. I get physically ill and am crippled with nerves when I have to meet people as myself. But when I step out onto a stage, or in front of a camera, as somebody different, it feels like I can fly.

Nobody understands who I really am, except him.

My husband fell in love with the version of me I was before. My success is relatively recent, and my dreams coming true signaled the start of his nightmares. He tried to be supportive at first, but I was never something he wanted to share. That said, each time my anxiety tore me apart, he stitched me back together again. Which was kind, if also self-serving. In order to get satisfaction from fixing something, you either have to leave it broken for a while first, or break it again yourself.

I drive slowly along the fast London streets, silently rehearsing for real life, catching unwelcome glimpses of my made-up self in the mirror. The thirty-six-year-old woman I see looks angry about being forced to wear a disguise. I am not beautiful, but I'm told I have an interesting face. My eyes are too big for the rest of my features, as though all the things they have seen made them swell out of proportion. My long dark hair has been straightened by expert fingers, not my own, and I'm thin now because the part I'm playing requires me to be so, and because I frequently forget to eat. I forget to eat because a journalist once called me "plump but pretty." I can't remember what she said about my performance.

It was a review of my first film role last year. A part that changed my life, and my husband's, forever. It certainly changed our bank balance, but our love was already overdrawn. He resented my newfound success—it took me away from him—and I think he needed to make me feel small to make himself feel big again. I'm not who he married. I'm more than her now, and I think he wanted less. He's a journalist, successful in his own right, but it's not the same. He thought he was losing me, so he started to hold on too tight, so tight that it hurt.

I think part of me liked it.

I park on the street and allow my feet to lead me up the garden path. I bought the Notting Hill town house because I thought it might fix us while we continued to remortgage our marriage. But money is a Band-Aid, not a cure for broken hearts and promises. I've never felt so trapped by my own wrong turns. I built my prison in the way that people often do, with solid walls made from bricks of guilt and obligation. Walls that seemed to have no doors, but the way out was always there. I just couldn't see it.

I let myself in, turning on the lights in each of the cold, dark, vacant rooms.

“Ben,” I call, taking off my coat.

Even the sound of my voice calling his name sounds wrong, fake, foreign.

“I’m home,” I say to another empty space. It feels like a lie to describe this as my home; it has never felt like one. A bird never chooses its own cage.

When I can’t find my husband downstairs, I head up to our bedroom, every step heavy with dread and doubt. The memories of the night before are a little too loud now that I’m back on the set of our lives. I call his name again, but he still doesn’t reply. When I’ve checked every room, I return to the kitchen, noticing the elaborate bouquet of flowers on the table for the first time. I read the small card attached to them; there’s just one word:

Sorry.

Sorry is easier to say than it is to feel. Even easier to write.

I want to rub out what happened to us and go back to the beginning. I want to forget what he did to me and what he made me do. I want to start again, but time is something we ran out of long before we started running from each other. Perhaps if he’d let me have the children I so badly wanted to love, things might have been different.

I retrace my steps back to the lounge and stare at Ben’s things on the coffee table: his wallet, keys, and phone. He never goes *anywhere* without his phone. I pick it up, carefully, as though it might either explode or disintegrate in my fingers. The screen comes to life and reveals a missed call from a number I don’t recognize. I want to see more, but when I press the button the phone demands Ben’s pass code. I try and fail to guess several times, until it locks me out completely.

I search the house again, but he isn’t here. He isn’t hiding. This isn’t a game.

Back out in the hall, I notice that the coat he always wears is where he left it, and his shoes are still by the front door. I call his name one last time, so loud that the neighbors on the other side of the wall must hear me, but there’s still no answer. Maybe he just popped out.

Without his wallet, phone, keys, coat, or shoes?

Denial is the most destructive form of self-harm.

A series of words whisper themselves repeatedly inside my ears:

Vanished. Fled. Departed. Left. Missing. Disappeared.

Then the carousel of words stops spinning, finally settling on the one that fits best. Short and simple, it slots into place, like a piece of a puzzle I didn’t