

Finding Katie

Harmony Kent

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ISBN10: 1508984859

ISBN 13: 978-1508984856

Acknowledgments

Cover artwork from:

Huge thanks to: Stock Project

I stockproject1.deviantart.com/a... for the pills image

*and to: SBG Crewstock sbg-crewstock.deviantart.com/a... for
the gorgeous ballerina image*

*and to: Mabafoun mabafoun.deviantart.com/art/S... for
the Fallen Gothic Girl image.*

Dedication

To all my loyal readers — you make it worthwhile.

Special thanks has to go to Emma Palmer, for her willingness and doggedness in being my guinea-pig ... she painstakingly read through the very first draft and offered pointers and encouragement.

Without my friends and neighbours, I couldn't do what I do; nor could I be who I am. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

Author's Note

I have taken certain liberties with the timeline on this novel. For instance, at the present time in the UK, the school leaving age is still seventeen ... until later this year. It changed from sixteen to seventeen last year. For plot convenience, I have pretended that the leaving age is already eighteen.

Punctuation and spelling follow UK rules and style. I hope my adored US readers are okay with this approach.

Lastly, a big difference between the UK and US healthcare laws is that in the UK, patients cannot be manually restrained with the use of straps, and the like, as they can in the US. Nor can a child or adolescent be kept in a locked room on a general mental health ward/unit. So, if some of the scenes stand out as different to some readers, this is why.

Finally, a note on terminology:

To be 'Specialled' means to be given one-on-one nursing care, and to have this nurse with you at all times.

A 'Floater' is a nurse or health care assistant who 'floats' between two or more wards rather than being based on just the one. This is a common device used in mental health care, and saves the cost of having an extra person on each ward. Instead, they go where they are needed at any particular time.

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Part One

*I killed someone, you see.
I killed the girl, who used to be me.'*

By NeverlandPoet





Chapter One

THERE IS much power in a name. Just the one utterance can resurrect the dead. Would that I had joined those decaying ranks. Death is easy. It's living that sucks.

-:-

The nurse is asleep in the chair. The monitor emits another brief, quiet beep. A too-warm draft from the open room door breezes over my face. Hospitals are always the same. I want out. It's not just the temperature, but the smell as well. Can't they get a nicer cleaning product? Oh, and don't even get me started on the fluorescent lights. Even now, in the dead of night, the lights are on in the corridor. Dimmed, ... but still. You'd think—being geared up for sick people—they'd make the place a bit comfier.

I shouldn't even be here. And I definitely don't need that silly cow in the corner. I'm being 'specialled' ... LOL. Like, I've been on my own all my life and NOW they care? What gives? Stuff it. I don't care. They'll just patch me up and ship me home, like usual.

My arm itches. The tight bandages stop me from being able to scratch it. This is maddening. And that bloody beeping is driving me crazy. I have to get out of here. The monster that lives in me gives a growl ... low, menacing. My heart speeds up and I break into a sweat.

An IV is plugged into my other arm. I grit my teeth, wince in anticipation, and yank it out. Warm blood pools on my arm and drips on the sheet, along with the cooler fluid leaking out of the tube. It stings a little bit.

There isn't much bedding for me to throw back, only the now-damp sheet. I swing my legs over the side of the mattress and sit up. The wires attached to the sticky pads on my chest pull tight. I stop moving and hold my breath. As soon as I take the leads off, the machine will alarm. That has to be the last thing I disconnect.

The nurse shifts position in the recliner, but then she snores ... for a minute I thought she'd woken up. The daft cow will get in so much trouble when they find out she was sleeping on the job. Fat Angie, I call her. She hasn't sat with me before. Melanie told me they had to get someone from the nursing pool to cover tonight. I almost wish I could stick around to see Melanie give it to Angela in the morning.

A laugh bubbles up and I have to stifle it quick. One of the ward nurses walks past, but doesn't look in. As quietly as I can, I grab my clothes from the bedside locker. It says everything that they're the same ones I was admitted in. See how much my folks care? They haven't even bothered to launder my stuff.

Dried blood has left my jeans and zip-front sweater stiff, and they stink of sweat and vomit. But I can't leg it out of here in this open-backed gown. The wires make it slow going and tricky, but I manage it. I have to leave the t-shirt, 'cos there's no way I can get that on without releasing the sensor pads. Still undetected. Okay ... here goes.

Fast as I can, I snatch off the wires and stumble for the door. The alarm rings out as I hit the corridor at a run. The opposite wall looms at me and I rebound off it. I

scan around to get my bearings. Shit. The nurse's station is between the doors and me. I tell you, I was born this lucky.

The hard floor is cold beneath my bare feet. Already, the bitches have stood up. The big black one has her hands on her hips. She means business. Well, I've come this far. The little mousey nurse stands to the left and behind the other one. I aim for her.

Squeaks and slaps echo as I lift, drop, lift, and drop my feet. The polished floor keeps sucking at my soles—hence the squeak every time I lift my foot back up.

The wheezing and pounding from behind tell me that Fat Angie has joined in the chase. Oh what good fun at the fair! I giggle as I run. Can't help it. It's not nice, though. It doesn't touch me. As old Shakes said: 'Mirth cannot move a soul in agony.' Have I ever been happy? Not sure I know what that is, when you get right down to it. Cold Kate—that's me.

I barrel into the small nurse. She goes down flat on her back. She makes the biggest slap/squeak of all. I'm home free! My hand is on the door handle when the big black bitch tackles me from behind. Shit.

'Get off me, you cow!' My yells, screams, kicks, and head-butts do nothing. She just yanks me off my feet with my arms pinned at my sides. She might look fat, but she's all muscle—solid. Why'd she have to be on tonight of all nights? Unfair much? Fruitless as it is, I struggle and wriggle all the way back to my room.



Chapter Two

MELANIE IS *not* happy. LOL. Good news is that Fat Angie won't be back. Score one for Team Kate. Ha!

My escape attempt did achieve something: I'm no longer on the drip, or hooked up to any machines. Yay for me. They figured if I'm well enough to abscond, I'm well enough to not need all that stuff anymore.

This morning, the ward nurses give me the cold-shoulder. Apparently, I hurt the mouse. Silly cow should've gotten out of my way. All I did was knock into her. How bad could it be? I've had worse, for sure. Does anyone care about that?

Right. Just what I thought.

A ward nurse and a security guy are in here with me. Melanie's off to some big meeting. About me. LOL. Like they're gonna change anything. Talk about 'play it again Sam'.

I have to laugh, though. The regular nurses are all so scared of me they have to bring in security. Not like the psych guys ... they just do the one-on-one and get on with it.

I stare at the TV, so I don't have to look at the two goons. They keep giving me wary glances, then whisper together.

'BOO!' I yell, just for the hell of it.

They both jump. Too funny. Sure beats morning TV.

Hours later, Melanie flops down into the chair at the foot of the bed. An exasperated sigh draws my eyes to her. All I get is a hard stare. Then she rubs at her already mussed hair.

‘What the hell, Kate?’

I look away, back at the tiny TV.

Melanie snatches the remote and hits standby. I stare at the black screen instead. She slams the remote onto the table. I stare at the screen.

‘You’re being discharged.’

That gets my attention. Startles me into looking at her. Just for a second. Then I go back to the TV. Too late, though—she saw. I shouldn’t ‘ave reacted at all. Now who’s the daft cow?

‘Well?’

I shrug and stare at the screen.

‘Don’t you care what happens to you?’

I lose it. She hit the wrong button. ‘Like you care. Like *anyone* cares. Why the fuck should I?’ Spittle flies from my mouth, and I have a headache.

I flinch and wait for her to slap me across the face, or somethin’. But the expected reprimand for my foul mouth doesn’t come. I chance another glance. Then away. Melanie just sits and watches me. The silence drags on. The tension drains out of me, and I flop back against the pillows. She isn’t demanding anything from me.

That’s new.

A full five minutes. I time it with the white wall-clock.

‘You won’t be going home. Not for a while.’

I keep my face blank, and concentrate on that little dark square that only pretends to be a TV. I don't trust her. I don't know where she's going with this. I don't know shit, these days.

'Have you heard of The Everglades?'

I shrug ... stare at the screen.

She doesn't sigh, or get mad. I thought she would by now. I can't keep from trembling though. I can't help but wait for the explosion.

The chair creaks when she leans back. 'It's an Adolescent Unit. Small. There're never any more than six of you there. We'll go for a visit tomorrow. Give you chance to have a look around and meet some of the guys.'

Who knew a blank screen could be so interesting? Again, the silence. I'm roiling inside. My heart pounds and sweat slicks my palms. Not sure I can face another psych admission. It didn't do me any good when I was ten, or thirteen, so why the hell would it work now? 'We'll stop by home, too, so you can grab some of your stuff.'

I hadn't expected that. Once again, I'm caught enough off-guard to look her way. But she's not even watching me ... she's staring out the window.

Melanie isn't like any of the health professionals I've dealt with so far. She leaves me be. Huh, she didn't even lay into me about last night. Wonder what it'll take to shake her chain?



Chapter Three

MY PALMS feel sticky with sweat by the time we pull up outside my house. We haven't spoken the whole ride over here. The nurse's little Ford Fiesta is in bad need of a clean, both inside and out. It's good to be in the fresh air again. Still, I hang my head while I trudge up the immaculate walkway behind Melanie. Not a weed or bit of grit or fluff in sight.

The knock isn't answered. Seventeen, and I still don't have my own key. I shuffle my feet, and hunch my shoulders against the chill.

'Cooey.' Mrs Batty, my neighbour, trots up the path and waves some keys in her hand. Her dark-brown tights are laddered, and her skirt hem is all uneven. 'Hello, dear. Are you feeling better? Your mum left keys with me. She had to go to work.'

Melanie steps forward and takes the keys. 'Thank you. We'll bring them over to you when we're done here.'

Mrs Batty frowns at the obvious dismissal, but at least she leaves without a fuss. Her loose slippers flop and flap when she shuffles away. Nosy old bat. She's the last person on the planet I'd want in my business.

The house is its usual spotless self. It sparkles more than the hospital. Mother probably spent hours cleaning all the blood up.

Out of habit, I creep around quietly, walking on my toes. I ease open each door and peek into the room before going in. Once I've satisfied myself that the house is

empty for real, I head up to my room. Melanie follows. She doesn't say a word—just watches me.

Self-conscious, I force myself to walk normally, instead of on my tiptoes. Sure enough, my bedroom's cleaner than the proverbial whistle. My mother needs the psych eval, not me. I hate all the flowers: floral wallpaper, floral bedding, and floral carpet. OMG. You guessed it: ... Mother.

Melanie watches while I pack my stuff and shove it into a tatty holdall. She brought the bag along for me. I surprised her yesterday when I mumbled that I didn't own a suitcase or anything. But she didn't comment—just raised her eyebrows. And this morning, she turned up with the requisites.

I feel tacky in these clothes. The psych nurse gives me privacy to change, but only after I've handed over the bag with my stuff. Is she scared I'll pack something extra? Does she seriously think I'm thick enough to try and smuggle anything onto the unit?

She pats me down before we leave the house. Gawd, they really do mean business at The Everglades. It feels more like I'm heading for juvie than a mental hospital.

We drop the keys with Nosy Batty, and get back into the car. Like the drive out, the return journey is silent. What's strange though, is that it doesn't feel strained or tense at all. It's like she's totally cool spending the day with a deranged mute. Whatever floats her boat, I guess.

The hospital lobby is busy and noisy. I hunch in on myself and hang my head. A tap on the shoulder halts my