

Dear Reader,

Who is Sophie McCarthy, and exactly what parts of her are missing? This is what my mother asked me when she heard the title of my new novel. Mum was very concerned (as though I had dismembered someone in real life!). I'll answer her question later, but first I'll talk about what inspired the novel. A number of years ago, someone I know was badly injured due to the carelessness of someone else. Some of my friend's injuries healed after a few months but she was left with long-term nerve damage and, as a result, chronic pain. The hard part was that she *looked* okay. Nobody could tell, or even understand, how debilitating the pain was. Her health, her career, her relationships, everything suffered. The person responsible wasn't impacted at all: he got to walk away unscathed. This struck me as being very unfair and I began to think about how that sense of unfairness – in certain individuals – might fester and evolve into something altogether more sinister. This is how Sophie McCarthy was born.

Sophie is a victim in this story – she is in a lot of pain, every day is a struggle, and she cannot work or live with the same ferocity as before. But there is another side to Sophie. A darker more formidable side. She's always been someone who excels at everything she does, highly intelligent, scarily ambitious. She's tough to work for, at times quite ruthless. We all know someone like Sophie. She's that relentless person from work (or school) who you half admire and half hate. The question I was asking myself as I was writing the book was, *what is Sophie going to do now that her world has come crashing down?* It seemed obvious that she would want someone to pay for what has happened. And that she would go to lengths no one else would dream of.

There are seven different perspectives in the novel (which was wildly ambitious of me!). We see Sophie through the eyes of the people who are closest to her. Her father, Richard, who has always been her champion and who is simply devastated by this terrible incident. Her mother, Dee, who is wary of her own daughter. Aidan, Sophie's partner, ultimately responsible and plagued with guilt. Chloe, Aidan's heartbroken ex-wife. Hannah, Sophie's downtrodden subordinate at work. And Jasmin, who is just a child, but yet a great source of angst for Sophie and a crucial piece of the puzzle. I've been asked many times who my favourite character is and of course it's Sophie. She drives the story from start to finish. Everything comes back to her. In the end, she surprised even me, her creator.

My mother was relieved to hear that all of Sophie's body parts are intact. It's her personality that's the mystery here, and it is revealed bit by bit. I hope you enjoy getting to know Sophie McCarthy ... both the good parts and the bad parts of her.

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