

ANTHONY KESSEL

The world was still against Edie, Edie knew
it seemed, and she was desperate.

CO₂

DON'T

exactly what

DOUBT THE

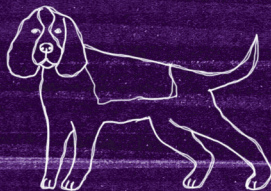
she had to do next

RAINBOW

these encounters were not
coincidence.

They were not
just a matter
of chance.

OUTSIDE
CHANCE



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PROLOGUE: THINGS CHANGE

It was a strange and discomfoting feeling, not knowing how you'd arrived at the place that you found yourself in. But thinking about that was a luxury Edie couldn't afford right now. She came quickly to her senses and knew she was in big trouble.

First, Edie had to get out of the space in which she was trapped – the cupboard that contained all the overalls for art class. She pushed the ones on hangers aside and used her feet to shift them onto the floor out of the way. Luckily, there was a little light coming through the cracks around the cupboard doors, but it flickered annoyingly, interrupting Edie's ability to see what she was doing.

Was that a paint pot next to her feet? Edie leant down and grabbed the object. It was, and she used it to bang as hard as she could on the inside of the cupboard doors. She had tried with her fists briefly already, and had hollered as loud as she could, but nobody had come to her rescue. Maybe the clanging of ceramic on wood would help. It didn't, and Edie was starting to get worried. And hot, very hot. She took off her sheepskin coat, way too thick for indoors, and let it drop to the floor. Next came the school blazer. In a moment of brief illumination, Edie was reminded of the T-shirt she

was wearing underneath: pink letters on the front read ‘Catch Me If You Can’. Somebody clearly had.

Frustrated, Edie whacked the paint pot on the back of the lock. The pot shattered into pieces, one cutting deep into her right hand. A glimmer of light showed blood streaking down her palm towards her wrist. Edie yelled out, a guttural shriek of anger and desperation. All that was left now, she thought, was brute force, so she took a step back and a breath in. Pursing her lips and pulling her arms together to strengthen her upper body, Edie’s shoulder barged the door.

There was an encouraging creak but it didn’t budge. Edie stepped back again, gathered her energy and slammed herself against the door. The wood around the hinges cracked, the right-hand door gave way and Edie tumbled out. Winded from the fall, Edie started to pull herself upright off the floor, but immediately realised that her problems had only just begun.

As she stood, it was the temperature that struck her first, like a blanket of thick, unwanted heat. Edie looked around her classroom and quickly saw what the trouble was. Flames were licking at the wooden blinds on the far external wall – the wall with a door and windows to the outside playground. It looked as if the fire might have started in a rubbish bin in the corner, which was already charred, but Edie couldn’t be sure. And it didn’t really matter at this stage.

Then the smoke hit her. The first wave made her gasp, and Edie’s hand moved instinctively to her throat. She remembered school fire safety training: the firefighter had told them that it’s often the smoke that kills people rather

than the flames. He had conveyed something else that was important, really important. Now, what was it? Edie closed her eyes tight and tried to recall. 'Come on!' she screamed to herself. 'You're a detective, work it out!' Oh yes, if you're ever in a fire stick close to the floor, where there is less smoke, and try to crawl to safety. Choking, Edie got down on her knees.

Steadily, she made her way over to the back wall, away from the flames, where she knew the main door to the internal corridor was located. So far, so good, Edie thought, as the heat seemed less intense further from the windows. Her heart sank, however, as she pulled down on the door handle. It wouldn't move. She tried to turn the lock underneath, but that wouldn't shift either. Edie cursed: who would want to do this to her – trap her in a cupboard and then in a blazing classroom? The doors on the new Highgate Hill school building were so solid that there was no chance of getting out that way.

Although her mind told her not to get close to the fire, Edie realised that her options were limited. She looked around – the flames were beginning to encircle her, spreading along both side walls. The whiteboard had darkened and coloured pen marks were dripping down the surface. On the opposite wall, Edie saw her friends' contributions to the term's India project gradually turning to ash. First, Allegra's poster of the Taj Mahal, then Yasmina's 3D wall hanging of the Himalayas and, finally, Edie's favourite: the gorgeous tiger mosaic by Lizzie. It was strange, though, as the creations reminded Edie of primary rather than secondary school. Regardless, they were all gone in seconds.

Eddie crawled slowly towards the far wall with the windows. Every breath burned her throat now and thick smoke raked at her lungs. Yet, despite the developing furnace she spluttered on, the temperature almost unbearable. As she reached the wall, Eddie leaned upwards to grab the handle of the door to the playground. She grimaced as it scalded her already bloodied palm, and instinctively recoiled. On the floor was a rag, which Eddie wrapped around her sorry hand, and then yanked down hard on the handle. Like the other door, this was locked too.

Eddie wasn't going to give up quite yet, though. One thing that her mum had taught her was to be a fighter. She stood up tentatively, aware of how dizzy she was beginning to feel, and used both hands to raise the classroom chair next to her above her head. With all the power she could muster, Eddie smashed the chair against the window. In a form of defiance, the window bounced the chair straight back at her. Eddie tried once more, but again it was in vain.

Tears welled in Eddie's eyes and she collapsed helplessly back to the ground. What was there left to do? Still on her knees she peered upwards, as if searching for assistance from the Almighty, but no hand of God came down to help her. Instead, Eddie saw thick smoke gathering. Embedded in the ceiling were the smoke alarms and sprinklers, oblivious to the deathly situation. What on earth was going on? Why hadn't they been activated by the fire? The world was still against Eddie, it seemed, and she was desperate.

With no idea what to do next, Eddie staggered towards the desks in the corner. She knew she was close to passing

out and could barely breathe. She crawled underneath one of the desks and just sat there. Was this it – the end of her short life? The end of her detective hopes and dreams? She wondered if her brother, Eli, would miss her or even care. Everything seemed so unfair, so terribly unfair, and Edie just couldn't understand why this was happening to her.

The sobbing intensified as Edie's mind drifted in and out of thoughts and consciousness. This was it, and what an awful way to go; in a place where her happiness had been shattered at some point back in time that she couldn't quite grasp. And alone, all alone. Edie was crying uncontrollably now, and everything around her was turning to black. She reached her arms out in front of her.

'Mum ... I want you, Mum,' she wailed.

Leaning forwards, a little quieter now: 'Where are you, Mum ...?'

Blubbering, losing a sense of her surroundings: 'Mum, where are you?'

And then Edie felt arms around her shoulders, pulling her forwards and embracing her. Confused, she opened her eyes into the darkness.

'It's okay, sweetie – you're safe,' came a voice.

And she knew she was, as Edie became aware of the familiarity of her bedroom.

'You're alright,' the deep voice comforted her. 'You're alright.'

'I want Mum,' Edie bawled into her father's neck.

There was a moment's silence as Dad held Edie tight. 'I know, sweetie,' he said softly. 'I miss Mum too.'



CHAPTER 1

THE BABYSITTER

When Edie finally re-awoke in the morning, the first thing she noticed was the broken blind on her window overlooking the back garden. She didn't bother using the curtains, thick hand-me-downs from the au pair's room of a few years back, and relied on the black-out roller blind to keep the room dark. Or dark-ish. The blind was at a slight angle, so didn't quite reach the bottom. The mechanism was broken: Dad hadn't fixed it for weeks, despite the promises. Not that Edie really cared, especially at weekends when she enjoyed watching dust motes floating in the sunbeams streaming through the gap in the blind, comforted by the knowledge that there was no need to get up for school.

A glance at the clock on her bedside table showed it was 11:37. No point in breakfast now, Edie thought. It was almost lunchtime; might as well stay in bed a little longer. A thin, sad smile spread across Edie's face as she remembered that Dad had stayed with her for quite some time in the night after her troubling dream. An hour, maybe two? Edie couldn't be sure, which meant she'd fallen asleep with him stroking her head – that always worked. Over the past three months, Edie had got closer and closer to Dad, which was heartening. She shared more and he listened more. And he

accepted Edie more: an acceptance, or appreciation, based on a deeper understanding of who Edie really was. The bond was stronger and Dad was more available if Edie needed him – and not just for car rides to the station. He was a good dad; she'd forgive him the broken blind.

Edie reached over and grabbed her iPhone from next to the clock. House rules meant it should be turned off at night, so she pressed the power button and within moments she was reconnected to the world. First up, all the overnight WhatsApp messages: there were a bunch from two different school chat groups, but Edie immediately went to her private chat with Lizzie. Accompanied by an angled shot of her best friend's head on a pillow was one message, sent an hour earlier:

What's up, Sherlock? Lunch in Crouch End? XX

After a quick response, Edie threw back the duvet and sat upright. She contemplated what the weekend promised: detective work for sure, with a couple of cases that she needed to progress; time with Lizzie, keen to be her Dr Watson; perhaps a little shopping in Camden Town; babysitting for a neighbour; and, easy to forget, bat mitzvah class at the synagogue on Sunday. On her fingers, Edie counted down, slightly nervously, from June: one, two, three, four ... just over six-and-a-half months before the big event. No complaining, she was the one who'd insisted on having the coming-of-age Jewish celebration, delayed from her thirteenth birthday because of Mum's death.

Stretching, Edie stood up and took a few paces over to her desk. She'd created a good working space, modelled on her mum's highly organised office area. As she looked at the tidy surface, Edie remembered one of Mum's mottos: an ordered desk means an ordered mind. And you needed that to solve crimes.

Edie inspected the in tray she'd marked 'Current Cases'. At this stage, each ongoing numbered investigation had its own see-through plastic wallet and sticky label. Top of the pile was the case she'd provisionally named 'Ethan Stephenson', which had come to her attention just a few days earlier. Edie felt that Ethan was a kindred spirit as they'd both lost a parent, and she was happy to spend more time with him. Ethan's case file was blank at the moment, but she would find out more this weekend.

Next up, 'Missing Dogs'. This was an odd one. Edie had been contacted by a Mrs Solomon whose dog had disappeared on Hampstead Heath. Having failed to get any support from the police, the woman had reached out to Edie after reading about the schoolgirl's heroic exploits in the *Ham and High*. At first, the case reminded Edie of other banal ones she'd been approached about, given her rising profile and popularity. Most of these were from kids at school: lost mobile phones, hacked computer accounts, social media problems. Others were from random adults, such as letters that had never arrived or stolen tyres. All of these uninteresting cases were sitting unsolved in plastic folders at the bottom of the pile – not exactly material for a supersleuth. However, on hearing of two other dogs that had disappeared in the vicinity over

the previous month, Edie's interest had been piqued. This missing dogs case needed looking into further, which she planned to do later in the day.

After throwing on a pair of leggings, white T-shirt and navy hoodie borrowed from Dad, Edie caught sight of the grey cardboard box file marked 'Completed Cases', sitting above the desk at one end of a white shelf. Edie didn't need to open it to know how little lay inside – and nothing that came anywhere close to the magnitude of Creation.

Edie needed her fortunes to change.



Downstairs in the playroom, Eli grunted in response to Edie's greeting. Glued to his FIFA video game, her brother was playing against a friend whilst simultaneously FaceTiming the same opponent. Each player could therefore hear what was going on in the other's home, which meant self-conscious Eli didn't want anyone around, and made his feelings clear to his loitering sister.

'In the middle of a game!' he stated forcibly.

Ejected from the children's space, Edie climbed the few steps to the main hallway and skulked into the lounge, where Dad was sitting comfortably in his favourite armchair in the far corner by the window, newspaper in hand.

'Anything interesting happening in the world today?' Edie asked as she made her way across the room.

'Oh,' Dad replied. 'Not really. Just doing the crossword. Want to help?' Before Edie could respond, he added with a

Eddie Marble's reputation as a supersleuth is spreading far and wide – everyone wants her help to solve mysteries ...

Where do

you think your

feelings are

coming from?

the

importance

Why does Edie's neighbour's long-lost friend suddenly keep turning up wherever she goes?

How can students fail an exam when they know their answers were correct?

What led to the vicious attack on an elderly woman on Hampstead Heath?

And – most alarming of all – should Edie's schoolfriend be worried about his stepfather's new activist friends?

As tensions across the city reach fever pitch, can Edie follow the clues and coach her own mind to avert a potential catastrophe?

of trusting

your

inner self

to deal

with life,

no matter

what

challenges we

in the moment,

might face.

Edie needed

to be more

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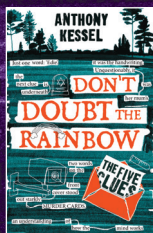
to what

was

happening

around her.

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