



the crash
lisa drakeford

Chicken
House

2 Palmer Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS
www.chickenhousebooks.com

Text © Lisa Drakeford 2017

First paperback edition published in Great Britain in 2017

This electronic edition published in 2015

Chicken House

2 Palmer Street

Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS

United Kingdom

www.chickenhousebooks.com

Lisa Drakeford has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this ebook on-screen. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic, mechanical or otherwise, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express prior written permission of the publisher.

Produced in the UK by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

Cover and interior design and illustration by Helen Crawford-White

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data available.

PB ISBN 978-1-911077-17-6

eISBN 978-1-911077-76-3

To Kate and Owen, with love.

Also by Lisa Drakeford

The Baby



'Feed me chocolate.'

'Feed yourself.'

'C'mon, your dad always has chocolate somewhere in this house. Find it, Sophie, and feed me. Think of it as payback. I deserve it. Who else would sit here watching *Eastenders* when they could be rocking it up somewhere else?' Tye shoves her in the ribs. She's lying next to him on the carpet; they've been there since eight o'clock and he's now hit 'pause' on the remote. It's always around this time that he demands snacks. It makes her smile – his propensity for sugar is unbelievable.

'Where exactly were you going to *rock it up*?'

He plants a hand on her ribs to shove or tickle. She braces herself. 'Chocolate!'

She's enjoying it now. 'Who exactly were you going to *rock it up* with?'

'Shut up! I do have other friends, you know! Funnier, more

attractive, cooler friends than you.’ His hand squeezes the skin just above her waist. ‘Chocolate, Sophe, otherwise I might waste away.’

The bubble in her brain gives a small ping. *This is the moment, this is the time. This is the opportunity you’ve been waiting for, for three weeks now.*

So she does it. She bloody does it. She lifts her neck, aims for his smile and kisses him quickly, waiting for the enthusiastic return she is sure will come. It’s bound to happen, it was always meant to be. This is what their lifelong friendship’s been building up to. The new era in the Tye and Sophie saga.

Only it doesn’t.

‘Um . . .’ he mumbles, averting his eyes. Those brown eyes which were usually soft and full of glitter; only right now they look like tombstones; tombstones which want to be anywhere else apart from Sophie’s front room.

She pulls away from his chest, feeling the sting of embarrassment on her skin through three layers of clothing. ‘Sorry.’ She coughs. The words scratch her throat. ‘I thought . . .’

Tye grimaces. She can see horror spark in his eyes.

That’s not nice to witness in your soul mate.

‘Sophe . . .’ Tye lifts himself on to an elbow and assembles his more usual expression on his face. But she can see the way he tugs at his T-shirt and runs fingers in his hair. She knows these gestures of old. He’s awkward, embarrassed and desperately looking for an escape ticket. Emergency exit routes are flooding behind his eyes. ‘Sophie, it’s not right . . .’

This is mortifying. How could she have got the signals so wrong? She’s messed up. She’s messed up big time and

if she's not careful she might just be wrecking the best friendship she's ever had. Other than Maisie, she's her oldest friend.

She has to put a smile on her lips, she has to do this quickly or else she's going to ruin everything. She's known Tye from the day he moved into the house next door, and they've been firm friends ever since. He's always round her house. Always sprawled on her floor. Always demanding food. It's a ritual now – something even her dad accepts. The weekly Tesco shop now caters for Tye's daily demands. Nobody minds. Tye's lovely. The whole family approves, even her grandma.

She sniffs, rubs her nose with the back of her hand and speaks louder than she means to. 'Whoops. Sorry about that. Don't know what came over me. Think for a minute I lost myself and forgot you weren't Channing Tatum.'

Tye lifts the sides of his mouth into a sort of smile, but they both know she's lying. He sits up straight against the sofa. 'Easy mistake to make.' He grins, but it's the grin he uses for strangers who he's trying to impress, and that stranger's smile is worse than an insult. Even worse than his knock-back.

Embarrassment singses the wallpaper all around her. It was a stupid idea. A STUPID IDEA. Just because they were both single. Just because he's attractive. Just because she'd had yet another dumping by a lying cheating scumbag three weeks earlier.

But her best friend's made of generous bones; his smile's already becoming easier and his eyes a shade more relaxed. It looks like he's going to help her. He tries a different tack: lies on his front, widens his eyes like a puppy. 'Chocolate, Sophie?

Please? I'll be your best friend. I'll do your hair. I'll introduce you to Ethan Price. I'll get you a part in *Grease*.'

It takes every ounce of courage. Every inch of nerve. She forces her fingernails into the skin of her hand and works at a conversation which she hopes will save a friendship. She shakes her head, rolls her eyes, and shoves him to one side like nothing ever happened. 'OK, OK. But let's make this clear. I am *not* letting you anywhere near my hair and I do *not* want a part in your stupid *Grease*.' As she stands up she feels a slight wobble in her legs, but she hopes this is the only sign that things aren't quite what they should be. She makes her way to the kitchen. The house is unusually quiet as her dad and brother are out. She stops briefly and puts her hands on her hips. 'Ethan Price, on the other hand, is an absolute Love God – so yeah, if you could somehow find a way for me to get my filthy hands on him, then I think it's worth a KitKat.'

She likes Tye's snorts which are muffled into a cushion by his side; maybe things aren't quite as wrecked as she'd thought.

But the next noise isn't Tye, or the TV springing into life. It isn't even the boiler. No. The noise which has her jerking her head back into the room is the most unnatural blast of a noise that she's ever heard in her house.

A second's drop in pressure has her lifting her head. A strange ringing in her ears. It feels like the walls and ceiling are suddenly carpeted. The suck of something in her stomach tells her something's not right. The movement on the floor by the sofa tells her Tye feels it too. The window starts to quiver in its frame. There's a strange clatter of what she thinks might

be next door's bin. Then a horrible, blood-curdling screech which prickles the hairs on the back of Sophie's neck. She reaches for the doorframe for support, but finds a vibration humming under her skin where there should only be wood. She yanks her hand away like it burns. Her forehead folds in puzzlement.

All in a split second. No time even for Tye to get up off the floor.

Then comes the loudest boom filling the room; filling her head; filling her stomach and stuffing its way down her throat. A noise so loud it has her gasping for breath. Tye slams his hands over his ears. Yelling something. But she can't hear for the explosion of everything else.

Something hard and huge is smashing its way through the bricks of Sophie's front-room wall.

Her dad's curtains are the first casualty. Floral pink things which Sophie has always hated, they get dragged and snatched from their poles so that one of the hooks catapults through the air and stings Sophie's cheek like a wasp. The pole wrenches chalky plaster through the wallpaper.

Beneath the curtain is a car.

A full-sized revving motor vehicle in her actual front room.

It's not a metre away from Tye, who shouts and yells with his hands on his ears as the car screeches closer. As if he could make it stop.

An armchair cartwheels from one side of the room to the next. A potted plant explodes into the middle of the room, spraying multi-purpose compost like confetti. Sophie can taste the soil. Some airborne flecks land on her lips. The

noxious smell of burning rubber and dust. The dangerous stench of diesel. Screams from people she's never met before.

The crumble sound of bricks giving way. Falling like leaves in autumn on to her dad's beige carpet. Thumping down now, like giant concrete hail stones. Like bombs from aeroplanes in World War II.

'Tye!' Sophie screams at him to get up off the carpet, but he seems pinned down by something invisible. Fear or panic, probably, but whatever it is, it looks strong.

His face is aghast. Alarm bathes his skin and eyes.

The wall-lights skew. They hang uncomfortably, their bulbs popping out in a fizz.

Murky grey is dragged over everything like a huge dusty blanket. Maybe it's smoke. Maybe it's dust, maybe it's exhaust fumes. Maybe it's the fact that the lights have gone off.

Sophie peers into the gloom. She needs to see Tye. She needs to see that he's not crushed under the front of this unwelcome mechanical monster which has appeared from nowhere.

She doesn't see him, but that's understandable – she can barely see her hand in front of her face.

There's muffled shouting coming from the inside of the car. A soft crash as a school photograph of her and Sam slides reluctantly down the wall. She takes a step forward and trips on the coffee table, which is now upside down in completely the wrong place. She feels the ooze of spilt liquid seeping through her socks.

'Tye!' she shouts again through the thick grey fog of the room.

The TV gleams through the fog. It is still on pause. Still in the position it always was. She gets distracted at how this can be, when there is carnage everywhere else in this normally organized room.

She feels around with her hands, over the coffee table to where Tye should be. Can sense through her nose that the steaming car is centimetres away. Hates it. Wants Tye.

‘Sophie.’

She stops, with her hands gripping the table leg, and feels relief flood through her. His voice is to the right, where the sofa used to be.

‘You OK?’ His voice has a wobble she’s never heard before.

She has to cough. The dust or the fumes scratch at her throat. Swallows. ‘Yeah. Where are you?’

‘The sofa.’

She nudges with her knee, pushing closer to his voice. Presses down on a piece of broken glass. Feels her skin moisten in pain. This must be how blind people feel. Why aren’t they always covered in bruises and cuts?

It’s hard to breathe. The air is almost solid with something. But she feels a hand on her arm and recognizes the comforting grip. Tye.

He pulls her towards him so that she knocks into a chair. ‘Careful,’ he breathes.

She falls on to the sofa, which has strange, smaller objects on its cushions where there should be only softness. A lampshade. A couple of chunks of plaster and a mug spilling the coffee which she’d made less than ten minutes ago. At least this is what she thinks the objects are, because still the room is

thick with grime.

Tye's fingers grip her shoulders and pull her into a hug. He's shaking. But he's still Tye. Her ear crushes on to his T-shirt and she hears the hammer of his heart.

They make a silent, still huddle in the middle of the chaos. She looks around her as some dust begins to settle.

The car is more than halfway through the wall. It looks unreal. So alien that it could be a dinosaur sitting there, not two metres away from the sofa. The engine under the bonnet gives off ticks and creaks. It oozes steam and more smoke. She knows there are people inside because there's muffled movement from behind the glass. She supposes she should get up and help, but for this small couple of seconds she needs to get her breath.

Besides, she's not sure if Tye is up to more action yet. His hands are horrible twitches on her arms. And he's not saying very much.

The TV in the corner, oblivious to the chaos, suddenly springs to life with the rest of *Eastenders*. The noise seems too much, because within seconds it plinks and fizzes into nothing. The white gleam fades out.

They're left then with nothing but a steaming, ticking car.

Emergency dawns, quickening her pulse. Don't cars sometimes explode? Isn't there something about leaking fuel? Aren't hard hats meant to be worn in demolition areas? Can't walls just suddenly give way?

Adrenaline, horribly delayed, finally kicks in. And she grabs Tye's arm.

'Tye, we've got to get them out of there.' She yanks his

T-shirt. 'And then we need to get out of here ourselves.'

The hammering on the windscreen springs them both into action. More warm liquid from where she's been sitting, on the back of her leg. Unpleasantly cool now. She grabs Tye's hand.

'C'mon.'

The hammering is muffled, but with a background noise of panic. Words which don't make any sense. Sophie can't make out the detail but gets the gist: these people want to get out, but for some reason they can't.

Spurred on by other human voices, Tye at last shakes himself out of his weird trance and jumps up with Sophie. They step over upturned and broken furniture to get to the passenger door. The foot of the coffee table jabs at Sophie's thigh. There will be a bruise tomorrow which will shock her when she wakes up in the morning.

Something plastic shatters beneath Sophie's foot.

There's a pair of pale faces glimmering through the side window and a darker shadowy one in the back. The faces at the front have mouths like thin lines of string. Their eyes are as wide as duck eggs. Sophie's never seen eyes quite so scared. They make her fingers tremble as she reaches for the door handle.

She's relieved to see Tye's hand shoot out before hers, because she's not good with blood. And there could be lots of it in that car. She can't watch hospital dramas, she can't watch babies being born – once, to her mortification, she fainted all over the boy sitting next to her in a biology lesson when they were watching a film on childbirth. So, the prospect of

opening a car door on to what could be a bloodbath stops her in her tracks.

She sidesteps on to more plastic and lets Tye tug at the handle. His body is warm next to hers, and suddenly packed with purpose.

He yanks hard but nothing moves. The hammering and muffled yells get more alarmed. It's like they're under water. He inhales, sticks his chest out, fills his cheeks for more strength and has another go. Still no movement.

The duck eggs get wider. They're in a boy's pale face and a girl's. A remarkable resemblance.

One more go. The strain in Tye's torso starts to look painful. There's some shouting from the shadow in the back. Sophie grimaces; Tye is nothing against this ton of steaming metal, leaking fuel on to her dad's carpet.

He looks around him, searching for an answer. Sophie catches his despair. 'We've got to do something. Quickly.'

He nods and then hurdles over the coffee table, dragging a leg so it grazes his shin. Sophie's left with the car and the glimmering faces looking frantic, their eyes glued to Tye's shoulders. He reaches the standard lamp and lifts it like a javelin. Sophie's reminded of pole-vaulters. He sheds the lampshade, tosses it aside and then returns to the car beside Sophie. They're both breathing heavily. It's difficult not to hear the rush of something from under the bonnet and the fuel which is still trickling underfoot.

'C'mon,' she breathes between locked teeth.

He points at the window, then to the lampshade. It's pretty obvious what he's about to do, but he has to spell it out to the

people in the car. They seem rooted to their spots.

'Get away from the window,' he yells above the steam.

The boy in front understands quicker than the girl. He tugs at her shoulder and moves them both with difficulty towards the steering wheel. The boy in the back is now shouting and gesticulating between them. His face has an ugly shine.

Tye uses the opportunity within seconds. He's now packed full of urgency; Sophie's relieved to see it. With a powerful jab running from his shoulder to his fingertips he stabs at the window with the end of the pole. The window, already under a certain amount of strain, crackles up like frost. The noise is like a sparkler on Bonfire Night.

Sophie exhales. Checks the steam from the bonnet. Won't look at the fuel now pouring steadily from under the car.

Tye pulls his hand back for another jab and this time makes a hole in the glass. Then another. Then another, until he's able to weave the pole from side to side, mashing the glass. Clearing a space.

The squeals of panic from inside can be heard properly now. They remind Sophie of frightened animals. There's a horrible yelling from the boy in the back as he pulls and paws at the girl. The noise is raw and frightening and very, very wrong.