

'I will talk to anyone about anything. I also eat biscuits.'

'Mr and Mrs Roberts, officially recognized brewers of the world's strongest tea. "We squeeze the bag."'

'I smell strange, but not unpleasantly.'

Kate thought she would like to take out an advert for the agency. The image would be a silhouette of her and Mickey within the lens of a magnifying glass. Below, it would say:

FALCON INVESTIGATIONS

Clues found. Suspects trailed.

Crimes detected.

Visit our office equipped with the latest surveillance equipment.

She made another note in her pad of the phone number on the advert, to be rung at some later date when the office was fully

"One man had a large moustache, the other wore sunglasses and no jacket on what had been a cold day – she'd thought they both looked of criminal character."

operational.

Eventually the bus reached the landscaped lawns and forlorn, fluttering flags of the light industrial estates that surrounded the newly opened Green Oaks Shopping Centre. She paid particular attention to unit 15 on the Langsdale Estate, where she had once witnessed what seemed to be an argument between two men. One man had a large moustache, the other wore sunglasses and no jacket on what had been a cold day – she'd thought they both looked of criminal character. After some deliberation and subsequent sightings of a large white van outside the unit, she had come to the conclusion that the two men were trafficking diamonds. Today all was quiet at the unit. She opened her pad at a page with 'Unit 15 Surveillance' written at the top. Next to that day's date she wrote in the slightly jerky bus writing that dominated the page: 'No sighting. Collecting another shipment from Holland?'

Fifteen minutes later Kate was walking through the processed air of the Market Place of Green Oaks. Market Place wasn't a market place. It was the subterranean part of the shopping centre, next to the bus terminals, reserved for the non-prestige, low-end stores: fancy goods stores, cheap chemists, fake perfume sellers, stinking butchers, flammable-clothes vendors. Their smells mingled with the smell of burnt dust from the over-door heaters and made her feel sick. This was as far as most of Kate's fellow passengers ventured into the centre. It was the closest approximation of the tatty old High Street, which had suffered a

rapid decline since the centre had opened. Now when the bus drove up the High Street no one liked to look at the reproachful boarded up doorways filled with fast-food debris and leaves.

She realized that it was Wednesday and that she'd forgotten to buy that week's copy of the *Beano* from her usual newsagent. She had no choice but to go to the dingy kiosk in the centre to get it. Afterwards she stood and looked again at the *True Detective* magazines on the shelf. The woman on the front didn't look like a detective. She was wearing a trilby and raincoat... but nothing else. She looked like someone from a *Two Ronnies* sketch. Kate didn't like it.

She rode the escalator up to the ground floor, where the proper shops, the fountains and plastic palms began. It was the school holidays, but too early to be busy. None of her classmates was allowed

to go to the centre without their parents. Sometimes she'd bump into a family group with one of her peers in tow and would exchange awkward greetings. She had picked up a sense that adults tended to be uncomfortable with her solo trips out and about, so now whenever questioned by shop assistant, security guard or parent she would always imply that an unspecified adult relative was just off in another store. Largely, though, no one questioned her, in fact no one ever really seemed to see her at all. Sometimes Kate thought she was invisible.

It was 9.30 a.m. She retrieved her laboriously typewritten agenda from her back pocket:

09.30–10.45	Tandy: research walkie talkies and microphones
10.45–12.00	general centre surveillance
12.00–12.45	lunch at Vanezi's
12.45–13.30	Midland Educational: look at ink pads for fingerprinting
13.30–15.30	surveillance by banks
30.30	bus home

Kate hurried on to Tandy.

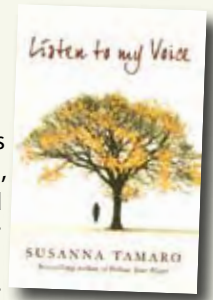
She was flustered to arrive at Vanezi's restaurant a good twenty minutes past noon. This was not the way a professional operated. This was sloppy. She waited by the door to be seated, though she could see her table was still free. The same lady as usual took her to the same table as usual and Kate slid into the orange plastic booth which offered a view out over the main

New Releases

Listen to My Voice

Susanna Tamaro

Havill Secker



After her mother's premature death, Marta is raised by her grandmother in a house of stories and enchantment. Her mother is romanticised and she believes her father to be a Turkish prince. As Marta grows up, the fairytale disintegrates and she angrily resents her grandmother for keeping the truth of her background hidden in make-believe.

When her grandmother dies, Marta is alone in the world with her unresolved anger and unanswered questions. Clearing out the attic, she stumbles across her mother's dusty journal and embarks on an emotional quest to track down her father and uncover the secrets of her past.

This direct tone makes Marta's story incredibly intimate and the revealing meditations on identity and belonging are genuinely moving, if at times a little self-indulgent.

Fans of Susanna Tamaro's international bestseller, *Follow your Heart* will not be disappointed.

Samantha Cracknell

The Beacon

Susan Hill

Chatto & Windus



This delightful novella looks at the inter-workings of family relationships and, asks the question, do we really know anybody?

The Beacon is a farmhouse where the Prime family lived. Kids: May, Colin, Berenice and Frank have a happy childhood, but May is eager to move on from the farm. Making her way to London, she experiences loneliness, and eventually returns.

Frank had always been aloof, but when he grows up and leaves home, making his way successfully along Fleet Street, he decides to write a novel, *The Cupboard Under The Stairs* that tells a very different story to Frank's actual upbringing. A publishing sensation, Frank becomes extremely famous, but at the cost of his family.

This book intertwines the deeply complex relationships that we share with our families, and with ourselves. At 154 pages, it's a great read for a Sunday afternoon.

Cherie Federico