

Chapter One

Chiswick, London, 1990

'Come here and hold my hand, darling. I hate to sound melodramatic, but I think I'm on the way out.'

Daisy was just leaving the bedroom as she had thought her mother was sound asleep. Hearing these words, she wheeled round in shock and dismay.

Lorna Buchan had cancer. She had fought it bravely for over two years with radiotherapy, a mastectomy and countless alternative treatments, always believing she would get better. But two months ago she had been told by her specialist that the cancer had spread throughout her body. She had resigned herself to this and refused any further hospital treatment, because she wanted to spend her last weeks at home with her husband and children.

Daisy was beside her mother's bed in a trice. 'I'll call the doctor,' she said, her heart pounding with fear.

Lorna smiled up weakly at her daughter. 'No, darling, there's no point. I'm not in any pain and I feel really calm. Just sit with me.'

Daisy was appalled – she couldn't just sit there and watch her mother die without doing something. Yet to argue with her now seemed awful too. So with her free hand she gently stroked her mother's head, while she considered what she should do.

Lorna had lost her lovely honey-blond hair after the radiotherapy, and the new growth was white and as soft as a baby's. Her face was gaunt because she had lost so

much weight and even her blue eyes had faded to a pale duck-egg colour.

It wasn't fair, Daisy thought, that her mother should be singled out for this. She was only fifty and she'd been such a striking, robust woman, always fashionably dressed, known to everyone for her vivacious and warm personality. She was the sort of indomitable woman who could tirelessly supervise a school fête, then at the end of a day which would have exhausted anyone else, invite all the helpers home for an impromptu party. She would still be dancing and laughing as her guests finally left. Yet miraculously by breakfast the following day the whole house would be tidied and cleaned as if nothing had gone on there.

'I *must* call Daddy,' Daisy said after a few moments' thought.

'Certainly not,' Lorna said surprisingly firmly. 'He has an important meeting this afternoon and I don't want him rushing home through the traffic in a panic.'

'But I must do something. Let me call the college and get the twins home.'

'No, not them either, they'll be home soon anyway.'

Daisy had given up her job a month before when her mother became too ill to be left at home alone. This was not an act of martyrdom – Daisy loathed her job, just as she had loathed practically every one she'd ever had, and there had been dozens. Housekeeping and caring for her mother was something she liked and was good at, and she used to think that she could handle any situation or emergency. Yet she knew she couldn't handle this one alone.

'I've got to phone the doctor at least,' she said resolutely.

Lorna turned her head away in a stubborn attempt to try to dissuade her. Daisy picked up the phone by the bed regardless and quickly phoned the surgery to tell them she needed a doctor immediately.

'That wasn't necessary, I only need you here,' Lorna

said weakly, as Daisy put the phone down. 'Besides, there's something I want to talk to you about.'

'I will get a real career,' Daisy said quickly, assuming that this was what was on her mother's mind. She was twenty-five and she knew her parents despaired because she was feckless and lacking in ambition. 'I thought I might join the police force.'

Lorna smiled. 'You'd be hopeless at that, you don't like taking orders and you're so soft you'd be bringing all the villains home for tea.'

'So is it Joel, then?' Daisy asked.

Joel was her policeman boyfriend of a year's standing, the longest she'd ever gone out with any man. Her parents approved of him, and she thought perhaps her mother was going to urge her to marry him.

'No, not Joel either, you are perfectly well able to make your own mind up about him. I wanted to talk about your real mother.'

Daisy looked at her mother in horror, 'I don't want to talk about her now,' she said.

'Well, I do,' Lorna said. 'What's more, I want you to find her when I've gone. I think it will help you.'

Her words made tears well up in Daisy's eyes. 'Nothing and nobody will ever replace you,' she said passionately. 'You are my *real* mother. I don't want anyone else.'

She had known she was adopted since she was a tiny child. Lorna and John had told her that she was extra special because they had chosen her, while ordinary parents got no choice at all. Even when she was five and the twins were born – a miracle because Lorna had been told she was sterile – nothing changed. Daisy never felt her parents loved them more, in fact she imagined they'd got Tom and Lucy just to please her. Not once in her twenty-five years had Daisy shown any interest in her birth mother. She knew she was a Buchan, whoever she was born to.

'You might think that way now, Dizzie,' Lorna used the

family nickname lovingly, 'but I know from experience that a death in the family can bring up so many unexpected emotions and questions. I believe finding her would help you through all that.'

Daisy didn't know what to say. Lorna wasn't one to make a suggestion like this without having thought long and hard about it. Since she knew she was dying she had organized everything, from her funeral service to filling the freezer with ready-cooked meals. There was nothing morbid about any of her arrangements, she'd been this way all her life, always thinking ahead, making life easier and more comfortable for her family. Yet Daisy couldn't imagine why her mother thought that finding a woman who had given her child away so many years ago would help her grief.

She stared out at the view of the back garden and there, as everywhere in the house, was more evidence of Lorna's planning and patience. It was beautiful, the herbaceous border just coming into its full glory, a bank of blue, pink and mauve plants. Honeysuckle had all but covered the roof of the old Wendy house where Daisy and the twins had spent many happy hours as children. Yet Lorna hadn't let it slide into decay or removed it once there were no children to use it. Each spring she planted flowers in its window-boxes and cleaned it out. Daisy knew that if she were to go in there now, she'd find the little pots and pans, the chairs and table all still arranged carefully.

Of course Lorna had hoped that one day there would be grandchildren playing in it, and Daisy's eyes filled with tears as she was reminded that her mother wouldn't be there to play her part in weddings and babies' birth and upbringing.

'I'll look for her if you really want me to,' Daisy said, keeping her face turned to the window so her mother wouldn't see her tears. 'But whatever she's like, she'll never take your place.'

'Come and lie down with me,' Lorna said.

Daisy remembered that her mother had always been able to sense tears or unhappiness even from a distance, and so she did what she was told and snuggled up beside her.

Her parents' bed had always been a special place. She and the twins had used it like a trampoline, pretended it was a boat, a desert island and a hospital. They had opened their stockings here on Christmas mornings, been tucked in here when they were ill, climbed in during the night when they had bad dreams, and as a teenager Daisy had often lain beside her mother and confided all her fears and dreams. But it was the more recent memories that Daisy thought of now as she put her arm around her mother: Sunday mornings when Dad had gone out with Fred, their West Highland terrier, or evenings when he was down in his study working. Then she'd come in here and end up baring her soul, about Joel, her anxiety that she'd never find a job she really liked, and her friends.

Most of Daisy's friends said they couldn't tell their mother anything important. Yet she had only to lie here, her mother tucked under the covers beside her, and she could talk about things that were unimaginable outside this room.

'I used to bring you into bed with me here when you were a baby,' Lorna said, turning her head on the pillow to face Daisy. 'I used to lie and marvel at how perfect you were, and how lucky I was to be given you. You may be a grown woman of twenty-five now, but I still think that way.'

She caught hold of one of Daisy's corkscrew curls and wound it round her finger. 'You were bald at first, and I always expected your hair to be fair and straight when it finally grew. I never expected a curly red-head.' She laughed softly, and her hand moved to caress Daisy's cheek. 'You are so beautiful, Dizzie, funny, generous and big-hearted too. I'm so very proud of you. That's why I want you to find your real mother, so she can share my joy and see for herself that I took good care of you.'

As always, Lorna had struck right at the heart of the matter, giving Daisy a reason to do so that she would never have thought of. But she still couldn't promise, she knew that no other woman would ever measure up to Lorna as a mother.

'Do you remember when I had chicken-pox?' she asked, changing the subject because it was just too heavy for her.

'Mmm,' Lorna replied as if she was sleepy.

'I painted on some of the spots with felt tips,' Daisy admitted. 'Did you know?'

'Of course I did,' Lorna replied, her voice hardly more than a whisper. 'Daddy and I laughed about it. We thought you might grow up to be an actress. You always liked to make things more dramatic than they really were.'

'I love you, Mum,' Daisy whispered.

Lorna murmured something about making absolutely certain of her feelings towards Joel before committing herself to marrying him, and then appeared to be dropping off to sleep.

Daisy lay there beside her for several minutes, but as she wriggled towards the edge of the bed to get up and phone her father, Lorna opened her eyes again. 'Say goodbye to Daddy and the twins for me, tell them I love them,' she said in a faint, croaky voice.

Daisy was instantly alarmed by the weakness in her mother's voice. 'They'll be home soon,' she said. 'You can tell them yourself.'

There was no response to her words, not a fluttering of Lorna's eyelids, nor any movement around her lips.

'Oh no,' Daisy gasped. In horror she knelt up on the bed, putting her ear to her mother's heart, but she could hear nothing. She held her wrist but could feel no pulse either. 'Mummy, no,' she cried out, looking down at Lorna's pale blue eyes, which were open and seemed to be focused on something in the far distance.

Her head told her that her mother was dead, yet she

couldn't believe it could come so suddenly, without some warning or a cry of pain.

It was so quiet that she could hear bees buzzing and birds singing in the garden. It was the kind of warm, sunny day that Lorna would once have spent gardening, or washing bedding so she could hang it out to dry. She had always been so practical and predictable, her days governed by a strict routine which was only altered by weather conditions. Daisy had sneered at this once; it seemed so mind-blowingly dull. Yet in the last few weeks she'd come to enjoy routine herself, found a sense of achievement in doing mundane but important tasks. She'd come to believe she had finally grown up.

But she didn't feel grown-up now. She felt as helpless as a five-year-old, kneeling there on the bed, tears running down her cheeks, not knowing what she had to do.

The shrill ring of the door-bell reverberated right through the house, and Fred began to bark. Daisy rushed out of the room and down the stairs, willing it to be the doctor. It was, and he took one look at her distraught expression and went straight on up to the bedroom.

At eight that same evening, Daisy went to her room, taking Fred with her. She shut the door and lay on her bed sobbing. Fred snuggled up beside her, gently licking at her face as if he understood how she felt.

The last few hours had been so strange and bewildering that Daisy felt as if her whole world had caved in. There was nothing normal to hang on to and the silence was eerie. But worst of all was the way her family were behaving.

The doctor was still here when Dad arrived home unexpectedly early. He said he was driving to his meeting when he had a feeling something was wrong, so he'd come straight home. Yet even though he had responded to a seemingly irrational impulse, he didn't react in any way when the doctor told him that his wife had passed away

only minutes before. He just stood in the hall looking blankly at him.

He continued to behave oddly, kind of stiff and distant. He didn't attempt to go upstairs to see Lorna, but politely asked the doctor whether he would like tea or coffee. Daisy desperately needed comfort, a hug, to be asked about her mother's final moments and given some reassurance she'd done all the right things, but she got none of those. The twins seemed to be important to Dad, though, for no sooner had he seen the doctor out than he telephoned the college and asked the principal to send them home immediately.

The death certificate was on the kitchen table. John picked it up, read it, then finally went upstairs to see Lorna. Daisy heard the bedroom door shut with a very final click, and she suddenly felt completely isolated.

John was still in the bedroom when Lucy and Tom came home. They had their mother's fair hair and blue eyes in common, but the similarity ended there. Lucy had her mother's rather stocky build, but her face was set in an almost permanent scowl. Tom was tall and slender like their father and normally had a wide grin.

They were red-faced and panting from running. 'Is Mum worse?' they asked in unison.

Daisy burst into tears then. 'She died a little while ago,' she blurted out. 'Dad's up there with her now.'

Tom immediately came over to Daisy to embrace her. He leaned over till his face was on her shoulder and Daisy could hear him crying softly. But to her astonishment Lucy rounded on her.

'Was Dad here when she died?' she asked accusingly.

'No,' Daisy sobbed. 'Just me. Dad came home while the doctor was here.'

'Why didn't you get hold of us?' Lucy demanded, her blue eyes cold and suspicious.

Daisy was in no mood to give lengthy explanations. 'It all happened so fast. She told me she thought her time

had come, and I asked if she wanted me to phone the college and Dad, but she said I wasn't to. She didn't want me to phone the doctor either, but I did anyway. He came just a couple of minutes after she died.'

'You should have phoned us, you had no right to prevent us from being here,' Lucy snapped, then, bursting into loud hiccupping sobs, she ran upstairs. Tom broke away from Daisy, made a sort of grimace, and quickly followed his twin.

The three of them remained upstairs for over an hour, and Daisy got the distinct impression she wasn't wanted there with them. It didn't make any sense, she had never been treated differently before, never felt she was different in any way, and it hurt to think they didn't know her grief was every bit as great as theirs.

She sat in the kitchen with only Fred for company, and she was still there crying on her own when Dad came downstairs much later. He spoke sharply to her, saying there were things which had to be done, one of which was calling an undertaker to take the body away. Daisy was well aware of that, but she thought he could have spared some time first to ask her how she was, and talk through what had happened.

Not knowing what else to do, Daisy began preparing the evening meal, but Dad just said he didn't understand how she could think of her stomach at such a time. Yet he and the twins ate the meal later and she was the only one who couldn't eat anything. After the undertakers had called and taken Lorna away, she was left to clear up the kitchen while they all went into the sitting-room together, and she wasn't asked to join them.

Joel had been very sympathetic when she phoned him, but he was on duty and couldn't come round. He said she mustn't take anything to heart as most people behaved a little strangely when they were in shock.

Now Daisy was alone in her room where reminders of her mother sprang painfully out at her: the many teddy-

bears in leotards, one for every gymnastic competition she'd ever taken part in during her teens; the blue frilly dressing-gown Lorna'd made her last year hanging on the door; the beautifully arranged and framed montage of photographs which she had lovingly put together because she said she couldn't stand any more sticky fixers spoiling the wallpaper.

Had Mum known it was going to be like this once she was gone? Was it only Mum who had been holding everyone together as a family, knowing it would collapse without her? That seemed impossible, but then why had she been so anxious for Daisy to find her real mother?

Daisy pulled Fred tighter into her arms, leaned her head against his fur and sobbed. At least he hadn't deserted her.

A soft tap on the bedroom door startled her. She sat up and quickly mopped her face. 'Come in,' she said, expecting it to be Tom as he often came in to talk to her late at night. But to her surprise it was her father.

He stood in the doorway for a second just looking at her, perhaps noting her red-rimmed eyes. He was a consultant in a company of surveyors who specialized in ancient listed properties, and he often joked that he was becoming like one himself, for his brown hair was speckled with grey and his once lean body was getting flabby. But in fact he was still remarkably young-looking, and handsome for a man in his late fifties; he was fit because he still played badminton and went sailing when he could. But his brown eyes looked heavy now, and Daisy didn't think she had ever seen him look so miserable or uncertain.

'We should talk,' he said softly. 'I'm sorry, Dizzie, I was so wrapped up in myself earlier, I didn't think what it must have been like for you.'

The nickname had started with the twins when they were babies and couldn't say Daisy properly, but it had remained in use because of her nature. Compared with her father and the twins, who were academically minded,

Daisy was dizzy, she flitted from interest to interest, never mastering any of them. If she read a book it was always a light, racy one, and she liked comedy, dancing, skating and gymnastics, anything fast-moving and visual. Yet one of her greatest attributes was her ability to forgive and forget too, and as soon as she saw her father was hurting, she forgot her own bruised feelings.

‘It’s okay, Daddy,’ she said. ‘Come on in.’

He perched on the edge of the bed and petted Fred as he asked her a few questions about what had happened. Daisy explained how Lorna had insisted she wasn’t to call him or the twins.

‘Just like her,’ he said sadly, fondling Fred’s ears. ‘I suppose I couldn’t have got back any quicker anyway. But I wasn’t prepared for it to be so sudden, Daisy. Last night she seemed so well.’

‘And she was fine when I helped her into the bath this morning,’ Daisy said, leaning against her father’s side. ‘She was talking about planting some new chrysanthemums for the autumn. I went in to see her later and I thought she was asleep, that’s when she said she thought it was the end and she wanted me to hold her hand.’

Daisy broke down then, and her father pulled her into his arms. ‘She’s going to leave such a big hole in all our lives,’ he said sorrowfully. ‘We would have been married thirty years next month, and I always supposed we’d grow old together.’

She felt better now he was holding her and behaving the way he normally did, and they talked for some little while about who they ought to tell right now, and who could wait until tomorrow.

‘I’m dreading having to repeat it again and again,’ he said wearily, running his fingers through his hair. ‘But as there’s no need for a post-mortem, the funeral can be quite soon.’

‘I could phone some people for you,’ Daisy offered.

‘No,’ he sighed, ‘I must do it. Her friends would be hurt

to be told by anyone but me. But tell me, Daisy, what did you two talk about before it happened?’

She hadn’t intended to tell him about any of that, not for a while, but now she had no choice.

Her father grimaced. ‘She had been saying that to me for some time,’ he said. ‘You know how she was, Daisy, she wanted to make everyone happy, tie up all the loose ends. You know her own mother died when she was only nine, and her father remarried a couple of years later. She didn’t get on with her stepmother and I think her father took the line of least resistance and refused to talk to Lorna about her mother. That left her with a lot of unanswered questions. I suppose she thought you felt the same.’

‘I don’t,’ Daisy said stoutly. ‘I’m not the least bit interested in my birth mother. I’ve got everything I want in this family, even if Lucy is nasty sometimes.’

‘She’s just a bit jealous of you,’ he said soothingly. ‘I think she has the idea that your mum favoured you. It will pass.’

‘I hope so, Daddy,’ Daisy said in a small voice. ‘She’s got Tom after all, they do everything together. I’m the one out on a limb.’

‘Neither of them will be going back to college until after the funeral, so we’ll all have time to talk and get things off our chests,’ he said as he got up off the bed. ‘But I’d better start making those phone calls, and I think maybe you should get into bed. It’s been a very harrowing day.’

Daisy did fall asleep quite quickly, but she woke later and switched on the light to see it was only two in the morning. Unable to get back to sleep, she went downstairs to warm some milk.

Daisy had left home many times in the past, to share a flat with friends, to live in a bed-sitter on her own, and once with a boy she wanted to marry, but however much she craved complete freedom, this house and her mother

had always drawn her back. It was a spacious Victorian family house, with large bay windows, beautiful leaded lights and all the best features of that period. Lorna and John hadn't changed it much. The dining-room floor had been stripped and varnished a few years ago, the kitchen had been extended and modernized, but as Lorna and John had always loved Victoriana, comfortable velvet couches, sumptuous William Morris prints and well-polished wood, it was probably very close to how the original designer had intended it to look.

Most of their neighbours were wealthy people now, but it hadn't been that way when Daisy was small. In those days Bedford Park was very much a middle-class family area and almost everyone had three or four children. They went in and out of each other's houses, stayed overnight, played and went to school together. Their parents had all been friends too, and Lorna was the one who kept it all going, organizing coffee mornings, supper parties and events in the garden during the summer.

But one by one the old friends left, their arms twisted by the ridiculously high offers for their properties. The new people had nannies for their children and sent them to private school. The women had no time for coffee mornings.

Daisy went into the sitting-room and sat down at her mother's writing desk. On it was the list of people her father had to phone. Judging by the ticks beside some of the names, he'd got about half-way through it.

She turned in the chair, looking around her, and felt a pang of unbearable sadness that she would never again see Mum sitting here writing letters, sewing or reading. It was a cluttered room, with many books, pictures, photographs and ornaments – Lorna could never part with anything which had sentimental value. And everything had remained, from small glass animals bought by Daisy, Tom and Lucy for various birthdays or Mother's Day, to an ugly elephant's foot made into a stool which Lorna had

been given by her grandfather. It was an awesome task to clean and dust this room alone, and Daisy really didn't know how they would all manage when the time came for her to go back to work again.

Part of Daisy's problem with work was that she really preferred domestic work to anything else. She was sublimely happy cooking, cleaning and gardening; she didn't take kindly to office or shop work with the petty rules and regulations. This made her something of an oddity among her friends who were real Nineties yuppies, bent on making money and buying their own houses. She had no ambition or qualifications – she hadn't done very well at school. All she really wanted was exactly what her parents had; a strong, loving marriage and a couple of children. But to admit that to anyone these days was like admitting to cannibalism.

That too was part of the problem with Lucy. For today's hostility was nothing new, she was always sniping at Daisy, saying she was aimless, dopey and out of touch with the real world. And in some ways Lucy was right. If Daisy was sent out to buy something, she often forgot what it was. Her love life had always been tangled and dramatic, she was emotional, generous, a spendthrift and very impulsive.

Lucy, on the other hand, was very bright. She had nine GCSEs and three 'A' levels and was studying economics. She chose her boyfriends carefully, managed to live on her allowance, and never forgot anything. Yet oddly it was none of these things which had caused the rift between them. That had started through Daisy's ability at gymnastics, and perhaps a bit of bad timing on her part showing it off. She had been something of a star in gymnastics at junior school, and won many competitions, but by the time she was fourteen she was tired of competing and only did it for fun.

Lucy could play both the piano and clarinet very well, something Daisy deeply admired because she knew she

would never have the patience to learn. One summer afternoon about six years ago, the whole family was sitting out in the garden, and Lucy was playing the piano in the dining-room with the French windows open so they could hear her.

Daisy didn't really know why she did it – perhaps, as Lucy said, it was because she hated her sister getting attention. As Lucy broke into a particularly stirring piece of music, Daisy went up to the kitchen door and proceeded to do a series of back-flips right down the garden, and came back up it again walking on her hands.

Tom and her parents cheered, interrupting the piano recital. There was a loud clonk as Lucy angrily crashed the piano lid down and shouted out something like, 'You'd better get a job in a circus, that's all you're good for' before flouncing upstairs in a sulk.

Daisy apologized later, but Lucy didn't come round and it was as though that day set a kind of standard which could not be changed. Open warfare became the norm, and Lucy used any way she could find to discredit or belittle Daisy.

It didn't help that Lucy suddenly sprouted up to five feet nine, got more than her fair share of spots and had to wear size fourteen clothes. Daisy couldn't help being slender, only five feet five and rarely bothered by spots, but Lucy behaved as if she thought a wicked fairy had cast a spell over her which was meant for Daisy.

Time and again she accused Daisy of being anorexic. She would hide her favourite clothes and relentlessly point out how stupid she was. Daisy was aware that she had often made the situation worse by yelling abuse at Lucy, calling her a fat swot and offering her medicated facial cleansers for her spots, and she was ashamed of this now. But Lucy had worn her down, spying on her, going through her room when she was out and generally getting up her nose.

When Daisy moved into her first bed-sitter, they did get

on better when she came home on visits. But as soon as she moved back, it all started again. By this time she was twenty-one and a little more sympathetic, so she tried to win Lucy over by asking her to come to the pictures or go out shopping with her. Yet Lucy seemed set on being disagreeable, and more often than not these trips out ended in a slanging match.

As Daisy wandered into the kitchen, Fred looked up from his basket and wagged his tail, clearly hoping he was going to be taken out for a walk. 'No walkies,' Daisy said, leaning down to pat him, 'it's the middle of the night.' She poured herself some milk, wishing now that she'd confided in Mum about Lucy – perhaps she would have had some good advice on how to deal with her. But it had always been just a private thing between the two girls; they'd never let it show in front of their parents.

'I just won't rise to it in future,' she said to herself, putting the mug of milk into the microwave and feeling guilty at the many fights they'd had when their parents weren't around. 'We have to be adults now.'

It was a very warm night, and Daisy got her cigarettes from her handbag and went out into the garden to smoke one, Fred padding softly behind her.

She had never smoked in front of her parents, it just didn't seem right to as they were non-smokers. Mostly she only smoked when she went out with friends, but the garden was a place where she enjoyed having a cigarette, it felt deliciously illicit. Joel didn't approve of smoking, and of course Lucy thought it was the pits. But Tom indulged, and they often had a cigarette together out here in the evenings.

Daisy sat on the swing seat and Fred jumped up beside her. She lit a cigarette and gently swung to and fro in the darkness, thinking about Joel and wondering if he would be able to get time off for the funeral.

Suddenly Fred let out a low growl, and Daisy looked round to see Tom coming down the garden in his pyjamas.

'Hi!' she whispered, not wanting to wake anyone else. 'Couldn't you sleep either?'

He shook his head. 'I can't really get my head round it, Dizzie. She seemed so well when I said goodbye in the morning.'

Daisy gave him a cigarette, and he sat next to her on the swing. Despite being like Lucy in looks, Tom had a very different temperament. He was equally clever, but he liked to act dumb. He was far more thoughtful and considerate than his twin, and more generous with his time, affections and money. He was popular with both his tutors and the other students, he was good at sport, passionate about rock music, and he had a great sense of humour.

They talked for a while about how they felt about their mother, and Tom began to cry. 'I didn't know it would hurt this much,' he whispered. 'I thought I'd be almost glad when it happened because she wouldn't have any more pain. But I'm angry, Dizzie, I keep thinking, why her? Look at all the useless, pathetic people there are! Why don't they get it?'

Daisy instinctively knew he didn't expect her to give him any answers, he was just getting it off his chest. So she held him and let him cry, suddenly aware that she would have to take her mother's place in the family now, for he and Lucy were going to be lost for a while without Lorna.

Neither of them had ever left home, they'd been in the same class since infants' school, they'd chosen a college in West London rather than going away to university, and their closeness had sheltered them from loneliness, bullying and all the many other little things that affect other children. Daisy could remember envying them when they were tiny. Before they could speak properly they used a kind of secret language which she didn't understand. They often slept in the same bed and they shared everything.

Yet Mum had always been equally important to them.

Wherever she went in the house, they followed. Even as twenty-year-olds this link had never really been severed – they had never wanted to go out at night as much as Daisy did at their age, they were just as happy at home.

‘Everything will be all right,’ she assured Tom. ‘We’ll still be a family, we’ll keep the house and garden up together. I’ll still be here.’

‘You aren’t going to move out then?’ he said, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. ‘Lucy said she reckoned you’d be off like a rocket.’

‘Now, why would she think that?’ Daisy asked.

He shrugged. ‘I don’t know really. But she heard Mum and Dad talking a while back, you know, about how Dad was going to manage when Mum had gone. Dad said he thought he’d probably sell this house and get somewhere smaller and more manageable because he couldn’t expect you to stay and look after it forever.’

Daisy thought about that for a minute. ‘I don’t suppose I would want to stay forever. I might get married, and so might you and Lucy. It would be more sensible for Dad to have somewhere smaller. But I can’t think why Lucy thinks I’d run off immediately.’

‘Because Mum’s left each of us some money,’ he said. ‘Lucy and I don’t get ours till we’re twenty-one, but you’ll get yours straight away.’

Daisy felt a stab of anger towards her sister. She hadn’t known she was going to be left anything, and it should have been a nice surprise, but it was just like Lucy to use it as a weapon.

‘Well, Lucy’s wrong for once. I will not be off like a rocket, money or no money, so you can tell her that from me,’ Daisy said resolutely. ‘Mum would want me to stay here until everyone’s settled down again, and I shall. Now, we’d better go back to bed, there will be an awful lot to do later today.’

It rained on the day of the funeral, the kind of soft rain

Lorna had always liked because it nurtured her garden. A great many people came – relatives, many of them distant ones, old friends and neighbours – and the flowers filled the courtyard outside the crematorium.

The service seemed so short to Daisy, and although the words the vicar spoke about Lorna were lovely, somehow he had seemed to miss the real gist of what she was all about. Perhaps Daisy shouldn't have aired this view later back at the house, but many of the neighbours from the time when she and the twins were small had come back for a drink, and they were all discussing the things they loved most about Lorna.

'I would have liked him to say how her greatest gift was to be able to chew the fat with people,' Daisy said. 'Do you know what I mean? She didn't just advise people when they had a problem, she'd sit them down, give them a cup of tea, and talk the whole thing through with them.'

Almost every one of Lorna's closest friends of many years nodded in agreement. One of them went on to talk about how Lorna had supported and consoled her on a daily basis when her husband had left her. She said Lorna was far better than a trained counsellor, because she had the ability to make you laugh even when you were in the depths of despair.

Another old friend, whom Daisy and the twins had always called Auntie Madge, a hearty woman of some sixteen stone who had called in at least once a week for as long as they could remember, spoke up then.

'You've inherited that gift, Daisy,' she said approvingly. 'Don't you ever lose it either, it's a great talent to have.'

Lucy, who was sitting on one of the couches with her best friend, Alice, hadn't appeared to be listening to any of this conversation. Yet even though Daisy had her back to her, she felt her sister stiffen and a kind of chill come into the room.

Later, after all the visitors had gone, Daisy was emptying

out the dishwasher to reload it with more dirty crockery and glasses, when Lucy came into the kitchen, stood by the door and folded her arms. She was wearing a very crumpled long black dress and a pair of Doc Marten boots. It was her usual style; Lucy professed to be a feminist and believed that women who dressed up in glamorous clothes and made up their faces were air-heads. Yet Lorna had hated those boots more than anything, and even Tom had urged her to look pretty and conventional for this one special day, because it would have pleased her mother. Lucy had taken no notice, and John, who was very shaky this morning, hadn't taken her to task about it when perhaps he should have.

'Something wrong?' Daisy inquired. Tom had gone upstairs with Dad to sort out some papers, and the house was very quiet.

'You haven't inherited anything from Mum, how could you when you aren't her flesh and blood?' Lucy said, her voice tight with anger.

Daisy wanted to say something nasty in reply, but knew that today wasn't the right day for a row. 'Auntie Madge was only using it as a figure of speech,' she said with a shrug. 'Everyone in the room today knew perfectly well I was adopted, but you do also inherit things from people through being around them so long.'

'So how come you haven't picked up any brains then?'

'Oh, come on, Lucy,' Daisy said impatiently. 'Don't be nasty today of all days. I might be tempted to ask why you haven't inherited any of our mother's sense of timing or diplomacy.'

She thought that would be enough for her sister to flounce off to her room, but instead Lucy flew at Daisy, clasped a handful of her hair, and hit her right in the face with her fist.

'How's that for timing?' she shrieked like a madwoman. 'I've been watching you all day, sucking up to all those boring old neighbours. Letting them know that you looked

after Mum, like you were the only one in the family that cared. The only reason you were here was because you got the sack from your last job.'

Daisy's nose felt as if it was on fire, and blood spurted down her face and dripped on to her dress. She was too stunned to attempt to hit Lucy back, and besides, she knew she was no match for her younger sister when she was this angry.

'I didn't suck up to anyone,' she said, trying not to cry. 'I was just being polite because they were Mum's friends and many of them had come a long way today. And for your information I got the sack from that last job because I kept having to take time off work when Mum was so ill. I don't remember you ever offering to drive her to the hospital for her checkups, or to help her have a bath, or anything if it comes to that.'

Lucy took another menacing step towards her, so Daisy picked up a French cook's knife, which was lying on the work surface. 'Touch me again and I'll stick this in you,' she hissed at her.

'Why don't you fuck off and shack up with your pig boyfriend?' Lucy snarled at her, but keeping her distance. 'You aren't wanted here. Mum might have put up with you, but that was only because she felt she had to. Dad, Tom and I all despise you. All you are is the cuckoo in the nest.'

'Better a cuckoo than an old crow,' Daisy retorted. 'Look at the state of you, like an advert for War on Want! You keep telling me how brainy you are, but only a complete idiot would dress like that for her mother's funeral. How do you think Dad felt seeing you looking like that? If he despised anyone today, it was you.'

She went to walk past her sister, still holding the knife in her hand, but as she brushed against her in the doorway, Lucy grabbed her hair again and tipped her head back. The knife was in Daisy's right hand, and as she moved to defend herself it caught Lucy's arm.

Bellowing like a stuck pig, Lucy let go of Daisy and went rushing out into the hall and up the stairs. 'She stabbed me, she stabbed me,' she screamed at the top of her voice. 'Dad, come quickly, Daisy's freaked out.'

Daisy grabbed a wad of kitchen paper to try to stop the blood flowing from her nose all over her and on to the floor. Then she heard Dad and Tom clattering down the stairs, demanding to know what was going on. The bottom of the stairway wasn't visible from the kitchen as the hallway was L-shaped, so as Daisy held the kitchen roll to her nose, she couldn't see her father and Tom with Lucy who was hysterical, shrieking as if she'd been the victim of an entirely unprovoked attack. Daisy was just about to make her way out there and say her piece when she suddenly felt faint and slumped down on to a kitchen chair.

'Stop screaming and sit down,' Dad said to Lucy, but his voice grew fainter as he led Lucy into the sitting-room to examine her arm.

Tom came out into the kitchen. He stopped short when he saw Daisy with blood all over her. 'What's been going on?' he asked.

'She punched me for nothing,' Daisy said weakly. 'Have I really stabbed her? I didn't mean to, I only picked up the knife because she was going to hit me again. She grabbed me by the hair as I walked past her.'

'Dad's looking at it now,' he said. 'What's the matter with you two? Isn't it enough that Mum's dead without this?'

It was unusual for Tom to be critical, normally everything washed over him. He was a calm person, who liked to take a back seat.

'She started it,' Daisy insisted. 'If she walked into the knife then it serves her right, she told me to fuck off and shack up with Joel, she said you all despise me.'

'I'm going to have to take Lucy to the hospital to get this wound looked at,' Dad shouted from the hall. 'I'll talk

to you when I get back, Daisy,' he added ominously, and the front door slammed as he left.

'I didn't mean to hurt her.' Daisy looked up at Tom, pleading to be believed. 'She's such a bitch, Tom. I bet she's telling Dad a whole load of lies right now.'

It wasn't clear if Tom believed her or not, but he got some ice from the fridge and held it against Daisy's nose until the bleeding stopped.

As Daisy sat there she told him exactly what had happened and why, but Tom still seemed to think she was mainly to blame. 'Why didn't you just refuse to get into an argument?' he said, his normally sunny face contorted with anxiety. 'You know what she can be like.'

'I can't take insults like that and say nothing,' Daisy said wearily. 'Nobody could. Can't you imagine how hurtful it is to be told I'm a cuckoo in the nest here? Am I, Tom? Is it true what she said, that you and Dad despise me?'

'Of course not,' he said, shaking his head. 'Lucy was just jealous because you were in the limelight today, everyone admiring the cakes and flans you made, saying how nice you'd kept the house and what a comfort it must have been to Mum to have you looking after her. She was hurt that she didn't get any compliments.'

'Well, she didn't do anything to get them,' Daisy retorted. 'It wasn't that I wanted to do it all alone. She wouldn't help me, if you remember. I'm every bit as upset as anyone else at losing Mum, but I couldn't stay moping in my room, someone had to prepare things.'

Tom gave her the same despairing look she'd often seen on her father's face. Dad was a person who didn't like confrontation, or being asked to take sides. 'Your nose is badly swollen,' he said, and it sounded like a pretext to get off the subject of his sister. 'I'll get you some brandy, and maybe you'd better go to bed.'

There was nothing Daisy wanted more than to sleep. She'd been up since six that morning preparing the food and she was totally drained now. 'Okay, but will you

explain my side of it to Dad when they get back?' she asked.

He nodded.

'Perhaps it would be best if I moved out,' she said.

He looked at her for a moment without replying.

'You think that's the answer, don't you?' she said, tears starting up again.

'I don't know, Daisy,' he said wearily, running his fingers distractedly through his hair. 'But I know I'm sick of being piggy-in-the-middle.'

Chapter Two

Daisy woke as Fred jumped on to her bed to lick her face.

'Don't,' she said sleepily, pulling the duvet up to cover herself. But Fred burrowed his nose under it to find her, and she was suddenly wide awake and remembering the events of the night before.

She had heard Dad and Lucy come back from the hospital at about half past ten, but they went into the sitting-room with Tom and shut the door behind them. Someone must have come up later to see if she was asleep, otherwise Fred wouldn't have been able to get into her room this morning, but she hadn't heard them. She wondered if it had been her father wanting to get to the bottom of what happened with the knife.

She touched her nose gingerly. It felt very sore, so she reached out for a mirror on her bedside table, at the same time noticing it was only seven o'clock.

Her nose was badly swollen, and there was bruising under both her eyes, but although it made her look gross, at least it was evidence that Lucy wasn't blameless. Joel had said he was going to come round in the evening and take her out for a quiet meal, but she didn't think they'd be going anywhere now, not with her looking as if she'd been in a road accident.

She lay down again and tried to get back to sleep, but her mind kept churning over the previous day's events. She was ashamed that such an important day had been trivialized by her and Lucy fighting, wishing she'd walked away and ignored her sister when she started the argument. If Joel hadn't had to return to work straight after

the funeral, she doubted anything would have happened. Lucy was never nasty in front of him.

Yet she'd called him a pig. Was that just to rile Daisy, or did she secretly hate him too?

Daisy sighed deeply. One of the things she liked best about Joel was the fact that he got on with everyone. After so many years of having boyfriends no one approved of, it felt good to be with someone who was admired and respected. Trust Lucy to undermine the one thing Daisy was sure of.

She closed her eyes and remembered when she first met Joel at a wine bar in Hammersmith over a year ago. She had noticed the big man wearing a tight black tee-shirt and jeans sitting at the next table to her and her girlfriends. In fact she'd whispered to them that he looked like a sex bomb. After a few drinks she'd knocked her handbag on to the floor, and the contents, much of it embarrassing, had spilled all over the place. He'd leapt up to help her pick everything up and had teased her about having a spanner and a screw-driver, asking her if they were burglary tools.

At the time she was sharing a flat with some girlfriends just across the road from the wine bar and she'd often voiced her opinion that it was impossible to find a man who was solvent, kind, reliable, trustworthy and sexy. Yet Joel turned out to be all those things and more. He made her laugh, he was strong and fit, and he was charmingly old-fashioned too.

Joel believed in real courtship. He bought her flowers the first time he took her out, and didn't try to get her into bed until their third date. Yet once they did go to bed, they were never out of it. In all her relationships with men she'd never known such utter bliss.

Maybe it was as well that they had all that wild passion then, because it had come to a somewhat abrupt end. First Joel got accepted by Hendon Police Academy, then she'd moved home again because her mum was ill, and they'd

had precious few opportunities lately for anything more than a quick snog.

'Do you want to marry him?' she asked herself, recalling how her mother had said she must be absolutely sure. A year ago she would have had no hesitation in answering yes to that question, but Joel's new career and Mum's illness had changed the relationship. She loved him just as much, but they never had time for fun any more. They were almost like an old married couple, meeting for a chat and a cup of tea, except even old married couples lived together and had opportunities for sex.

Of course, she was jumping the gun anyway. Joel talked loosely about getting married in a vague, well-into-the-future sort of way, but he'd never actually proposed. She supposed that if she asked him if she could move into his flat with him he'd agree, but did she really want that?

She just didn't know. He worked such long, odd hours, she hadn't even got a job, and leaving here just because of Lucy could be a serious mistake. But then she was an expert on serious mistakes, she seemed to have made them all. Looking back, she could see she had lived her life as though she was a piece of driftwood, being tossed this way and that by the boyfriends she'd had, never really making decisions for herself.

She should have gone into catering or hotel management work when she left school at sixteen, because she had a flair for cooking and was good with people. But the boyfriend she had at the time didn't want her to work unsocial hours. Looking back, that was a joke because he didn't work at all, and all they ever did was stay in his grubby bed-sitter, watching TV and making love. To add insult to injury, he ditched her for a nurse, and nurses' hours couldn't be more unsocial.

Daisy's next serious love affair was with a car parts salesman. He lived in Leicester, and she stayed with him in his hotel room whenever he was in London overnight. As she always had to make herself available for him,

she couldn't start a night-school course then. Later she discovered he was married with three children, and it took her a long time to get over that betrayal.

So it went on. Work was just something she did for money, her main concern was pleasing the current man in her life. There had been quite lengthy periods without a man, of course, but then her mind was always full of where to find the next one, never thinking she should take some time out and discover what she really wanted for herself.

Daisy compared herself to some of her friends for a moment. Cathy was in computers, Sarah was a financial adviser, and Trudy worked for a travel agent. What was it about each of them that made them so ambitious and hard-working?

It was true they'd all done better than her at school and had furthered their education with various training courses, yet the one thing which the other three shared, which she realized she had overlooked before, was that they didn't come from backgrounds like hers.

She suddenly understood why they often teased her. Trudy came from a council flat in Hammersmith, the other two were estranged from their parents and had been living alone since they were eighteen. None of them had ever had either the material things Daisy had or the benefits of intelligent, loving and supporting parents. So it wasn't really surprising that they were hungry for the good things in life, and unlike Daisy knew the only way they were going to get them was through their own hard work.

Ashamed of herself, she got up and pulled on jeans and a tee-shirt to take Fred out. As she walked down towards Turnham Green with Fred pulling on the lead to get to the grass, her thoughts turned from herself to Lucy. She wondered how badly cut her sister's arm was, and if they could make it up today.

The sky was a sullen grey and it looked as though it was going to rain later. But walking with Fred lifted her

spirits slightly, for the way he ran around enthusiastically sniffing every last tree, post or seat was amusing. He too had been very confused for the last few days. He kept going up to her parents' bedroom and looking through the door as if he expected to see Mum there. While Lorna had been in bed during the day, he'd got into the habit of going up there to keep her company, even though prior to her illness the bedrooms were out of bounds. Now Dad kept chasing him off downstairs again, and poor Fred must be wondering what they'd done with Mum, Daisy thought, for he'd been very much her dog.

That was another problem: what would they do about Fred when Daisy went back to work? It was hardly fair on him to be shut indoors alone all day when he wasn't used to it.

Daisy was out much longer than usual as Fred kept running off when she tried to put him back on the lead. As she opened the front door her father was coming down the stairs, already dressed in casual trousers and a sweat-shirt.

He frowned when he saw her. 'I think we'd better talk,' he said sharply.

Daisy put the kettle on and began laying the kitchen table for breakfast. 'Don't bother with that,' he said impatiently. 'I want to know what on earth you thought you were doing sticking a knife in Lucy.'

'I didn't stick it in her,' she said indignantly, and went on to explain that Lucy had only herself to blame as she'd grabbed hold of her hair.

'I know all that,' he said impatiently. 'Tom told me. But how could you even think of threatening your sister with a knife?'

'Because she did this to me for no reason whatsoever,' Daisy said, tapping her nose. 'She was like a madwoman. I picked up the knife so she'd back off. You should have heard the things she said!'

'That's no excuse,' he insisted. 'Lucy had just been to

her mother's funeral, for God's sake, she was upset. Surely you could have seen she couldn't be rational?'

'It was my mother's funeral too, and so was I upset.' Daisy's voice rose high with hurt. 'It seems to me you share Lucy's opinion that I'm just a cuckoo in the nest and have no rights or feelings,' she said, her eyes filling with tears.

'Of course I don't, but you are five years older than her and I expect some restraint from you,' he said, his face flushed with irritation. 'I can't be doing with any more fireworks between you two.'

Daisy didn't have restraint, she tended to be bull-headed, charging in when she should have stopped to think. She was so hurt because Dad seemed to be putting all the blame on to her that she struck out, 'Well, thanks a bunch, Dad, for taking into consideration that it was me who took care of Mum for all these weeks. Lucy didn't care enough for her when she was alive to even wash her hair for her. It was me too who got everything together in the last few days, with no help from Lucy.' She paused to take a breath and saw no sympathy on her father's face, only irritation.

'I'll clear off now and find somewhere else to live,' she added. 'Then maybe you'll see what a selfish little bugger Lucy really is.'

She turned and ran out of the kitchen and up to her bedroom, tears streaming down her face. She hastily threw some things into an overnight bag and within minutes she was slamming the front door behind her and running to her car. Surprisingly, as it usually took a while to decide to go, her old VW Beetle started first time and she took off in the direction of Acton and Joel's flat.

Joel had been in the navy before she met him, and he'd bought this place when he came back to London. He had been very reluctant for Daisy to see it when they first met, and she understood why when he did eventually take her there. It was a poky two-bedroom flat on the second

floor of a small, run-down council block. Its only attribute was that it was cheap. Joel had no furniture other than a bed, a fridge and a cooker, not even curtains at the windows.

He had done a great deal more to the flat while he was waiting to start his police training. He'd decorated and put down carpets, and it was quite cosy inside now, but the mucky communal concrete staircases and landings made it a very depressing-looking place to live.

Daisy let herself in with her own key, as she didn't expect Joel to be there. To her amazement he came into the hall, wearing only his boxer shorts, just as she was closing the door behind her.

'What on earth!' he exclaimed in surprise, and at that she burst into tears.

Joel was big, six feet two of hard-packed muscle, with brown hair cut as short as a squaddie's and a thick neck. Yet he had a surprisingly boyish face, pinkish-toned skin, long dark eyelashes and a soft, full mouth. But then, he was a man of many opposing attributes. He looked tough, yet he could be so gentle; he played rugby, yet he liked poetry. He would drive his car with heavy-metal rock playing full blast, yet at home he liked to listen to classical music.

Daisy told him all that had happened and he took her into the bedroom, sat her down on his unmade bed and went to make her a cup of tea.

As always, his flat was like a tip. Every time Daisy came round here she cleaned it up and put his clothes away, but it was always a mess the next time she called. He used the ironing board for everything. Right now his boots were sitting on it, as he'd been cleaning them. Quite often she'd seen empty takeaway cartons on it, but rarely an iron. Yet strangely, Joel was very fastidious. His fingernails were always clean, he smelled of soap and water, he didn't even have smelly feet like most men she knew.

'I don't think you should have run off like that,' he said

sternly when he came back with her tea. 'Your dad is facing the biggest crisis he's ever known, and he can't cope with you and Lucy squabbling.'

'It was all her,' Daisy said indignantly. 'I want to be friends, she doesn't. She hates me.'

Joel looked anxious. 'I wish I could stay with you for a bit and talk about it, but I've got to go to work now,' he said, going over to the chair where his uniform was hanging. 'I won't be back till six either. You are welcome to stay here, but I don't think it's the right thing to do.'

'Well, thanks for being so understanding. I thought you'd be on my side,' Daisy snapped at him.

'Of course I'm on your side,' he assured her. 'Lucy's a jealous little cow, I've seen that dozens of times. I suppose it's all just surfaced because of what's happened.'

'What's she got to be jealous of me for?'

Joel laughed, his brown eyes twinkling. 'Look in the mirror, Daisy. You're lovely and she's quite ordinary, you sparkle, she's like a flat beer. All she's got is her superior intellect, but I don't suppose that gives her much comfort.'

He kissed her lingeringly before he left, whispering that tonight they'd make up for lost time. 'Put your feet up and relax,' he said. 'Part of the trouble is that you've been overwrought for a long time. But I have some special magic to put that right.'

Daisy didn't relax, she couldn't in such a messy place. She put clean linen on the bed, washed the mountain of dirty dishes, then cleaned the flat throughout.

She was just sitting down with a cup of tea, intending to watch the Friday afternoon film later, when the doorbell rang. Joel said the only callers he ever had were people selling things from catalogues, so she expected it to be one of them.

It was a shock to open the door and find her father standing there.

'May I come in?' he asked.

'How did you know where I was?' Daisy asked.

He smiled wryly. 'I hardly need to be Brain of Britain to work that one out. Don't worry, I'm not going to drag you home if you want to stay here. But I couldn't let you go without telling you I love you and hope you'll reconsider.'

That took the wind right out of her sails. She had spent the morning imagining he was glad she'd gone.

He came in and sat down in the living-room while Daisy made him some coffee. 'It's very neat and tidy,' he said, looking round the room approvingly. 'Joel's a bit of a wonder all round.'

'I just finished cleaning it,' she admitted. 'I'm glad you didn't come earlier, you might not have been so impressed.'

'Actually, I like people to have faults.' He smiled faintly. 'It makes them human. Mine is that I want everything to run smoothly, but don't know how to arrange that myself. Lucy's is that she's riddled with jealousy, and Tom's is that he tries very hard not to take sides. Yours, Daisy, is that you are far too impetuous. Now, are we going to find a way so that we can all live together without any more fights? I feel so wretched without Lorna, and I know you do too, and it's only together that we'll feel a bit better.'

Daisy looked down at her hands and said nothing. There was nothing she *could* say. Lucy had been out of order, they both knew that.

'We can't manage without you,' Dad went on. 'None of us is good at cooking or housekeeping. We need time and a bit of training all round before we'll be able to cope on our own. I know that sounds as if I only want you as a housekeeper, but I'm sure you know that isn't the way it is.'

Daisy had never seen herself as a Cinderella type. Long before Mum became ill she'd always helped around the house and cooked meals because she liked to. She could see the logic in what Dad had said, and in her heart of

hearts she wanted to go back home. She also knew it wasn't right to put more strain on her father now while he was grieving.

'But I can't come back unless Lucy changes a bit,' she said. 'I can't live with her always sniping at me.'

'She isn't only jealous, she's also burdened with guilt,' he answered. 'She knows she should have done more for her mother in the past months, she admitted it last night. The less she did, the more you had to do, and so it went on, round and round, screwing her up even more.'

'Well, can't we forget all that and start again?' Daisy said.

'That statement, my darling Dizzie, is precisely the fundamental difference between you two girls. You could do that, wipe the slate clean and start again. Lucy can't. Her whole nature is completely opposite to yours. She sees everything in black and white, no shades of grey. She compartmentalizes her life – college work in one box, home life in another, social life in another, and so on. You throw her because you are fluid, adapting to circumstances, and you don't just see shades of grey, you see the whole rainbow.'

'Do I?' Daisy said in surprise.

He chuckled. 'That wasn't the best analogy in the world, but it's the best I can come up with for now. Both of you have great strengths. Lucy has determination, ambition and a keen analytical mind. You have warmth, compassion and a wonderful sense of fun.'

'I sometimes wish I had Lucy's strengths,' Daisy said sadly.

'She wishes she had yours too,' he answered, leaning towards her and taking her hand in his. 'But the one thing she wished she had, above all else, was the easy, comfortable relationship you had with your mother. She told me last night that she would hear you laughing and talking together and she hated that she couldn't do it. She couldn't tell her mother that she loved her either. I think

she imagines that if she'd got back to the house before she died, she could have said it.'

'I see,' Daisy said thoughtfully, suddenly understanding why Lucy flew at her that day. 'But she's daft, Mum knew everything about all of us. She accepted us all as we were.'

'Lucy will see that in time too,' he said soothingly. 'So my suggestion is that you stay here with Joel over the weekend, then come home again on Monday. Tom and Lucy will be back at college, and you can look for a job again. I'll have to try and find a cleaning lady fairly soon. It isn't fair to expect you to do everything for evermore.'

'What does Lucy say about this plan?'

'Well, she was in her compartmentalization mood again this morning.' He smiled wryly. 'She was terrified she'd be expected to cook, clean and do her college work, so she'll be relieved. As for Tom and me, we just want you back where you belong.'

That was enough for Daisy. She moved over to sit beside her father and hugged him. 'Okay, I'll come back on Monday morning. I'd do anything to try and keep you from feeling sad.'

'That comes in waves,' he said. 'One minute I'm glad she was released from all the pain, the next I'd sell my soul to the devil to have her back. I keep getting these images of her around the house, sometimes they are so clear I really think she's there. Maybe I'll feel better once I get back to work.'

'What's that?' Daisy said, suddenly noticing he had brought a bag with him.

He grinned. 'Actually it's for you. I thought it might be a good time for you to go through it. It's a box of stuff all relating to you, from when you were a baby. Your mum made one for each of you, she religiously added stuff whenever she thought something important had happened. I daresay there'll be a letter in there for you too, you know how organized she was.'

Daisy unzipped the bag. Inside was an oblong tin box,

like a large cash-box with a handle on the top, only it had been decorated with a montage of pictures and varnished over.

'Here's the key,' Dad said, standing up and taking it from his pocket. 'I'll be off now. I've got to get Fred some dog food and buy some bread.'

After Daisy had seen her father out she took the box on to her knee and studied it. She thought she knew every single thing that was in her parents' house, they'd never been one for keeping things secret, but she'd never seen this box before, and that made it even more exciting.

All the pictures on the outside were of her, family snaps cut up and stuck on at random. She wondered exactly when Mum had finished it. Some of the pictures were only a year old, so it must have been quite recently, and there was no room for any more so she must have finished it off knowing her end was near. Daisy opened the box gingerly, not sure what to expect. Her eyes filled with tears at what she saw.

There were newspaper cuttings about her gymnastics wins, school reports, an essay she'd written about her family, pieces of artwork she couldn't remember doing, a needle case she'd made for her mother one Christmas. There were her first teeth, sealed in a little plastic bag, a photograph of her with no front teeth, and a class photograph from when she left junior school. So much stuff, important to nobody but her, and she was overwhelmed by the knowledge that it had all been collected with such love and care.

Between the pictures, cuttings and miscellaneous items were many little notes written by her mother. Some were humorous reports on incidents, like the time she fell into a pond on a school outing and had to be brought back with a teacher's gloves on her feet, or when she starred as Dorothy in the school production of *The Wizard of Oz*.

Daisy laughed at many of these, for it was an adult view

on occasions she'd almost forgotten, and an insight into how Lorna viewed her daughter's character. But some were serious, and showed her just how worried her mother had been on many occasions.

One such note was written at the time Daisy was seeing Kevin. He was the boy who dissuaded her against hotel or catering work when she was sixteen.

I feel so powerless and frightened for her, her mother had written. I keep asking myself am I just a snob that I can't bear to think of my baby being with such an uncouth lout? I'm tortured with fear that she will get pregnant, and that will lead to a lifetime of misery for her. I wish I were brave enough to just lock her in her room so she can't see him, but of course I know that will only make her keener on him. So I pretend to if not approve, at least seem resigned to it. I even try and act as if I like Kevin on the rare occasions he comes here. I'm sure every mother believes her daughter is the most beautiful, talented child in the world, and wants nothing less than a prince for her. But I'd be happy to settle for just a good man for my Daisy, one who would take care of her, treat her with love and respect. I wouldn't mind at all if he were just an ordinary working man.

Daisy felt choked up as she read this, for she had never realized her mother felt so strongly. She remembered how understanding she had been when Kevin finally ditched her, she had listened to Daisy raging about him, yet not once had she ever said that she was well rid of him.

Daisy shuddered herself now when she thought about Kevin, but how wise Mum had been to keep her own counsel. Daisy might very well have gone out and found an identical replacement for him if she had known how much her mother had despised him. Girls are like that at sixteen.

There were notes about Harry, the married man, too. Her mother had suspected he was married all along, and

she spoke of her fear that Daisy's heart would be broken. Again, when it was over, the only thing Mum had said on the subject that stood out in Daisy's mind was that no woman should take happiness at another's expense.

There was no real order in the box, it seemed as if her mother had often gone through it, read things and put them back. Sometimes there was a note on an event when Daisy was five or six, then one right next to it from her twenties. There was a great deal about her early days, problems with feeding, trips to the clinic to get her weighed and vaccinated, even a very funny report on the trials of potty training. But as Daisy got right down to the bottom of the box, she found two sealed envelopes.

Daisy opened the fatter one first, to find it contained her adoption papers, her original birth certificate, two faded black and white photographs and a note from Lorna. She recalled Mum trying to show her this bundle when she was about thirteen. Daisy had refused point-blank to look at the contents. In subsequent years it became something of a joke: Lorna would ask if she was ready to look at them now, and Daisy continued to refuse. She had really wanted to look, at least she had once she was around sixteen, but she had always been afraid her mother would be hurt by her change of heart.

She looked at the birth certificate now and saw that her real name was Catherine Pengelly, her mother's name was Ellen Dorothy and her birth was registered in Bristol. Yet the saddest thing of all was in the space for her father's name – the word *UNKNOWN*, in spidery writing.

Daisy sat looking at it for some time. *Unknown* was such a bleak, chilling word. Did it mean her mother didn't know who the father was? Or had she refused to name him for some reason known only to herself?

Daisy knew that nowadays when a couple weren't married the child could be registered in the father's or the mother's name, and in either case the father had to attend