

The True Tale of Jezebel Cole

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Prologue

Everyone was talking about the disappearance of Patty Belleville. She had been a media celebrity for nigh on thirty years, appearing on practically every chat show - even agreeing to participate in a series of Celebrity Big Brother one year, just to promote her latest book. She thrived on publicity and acclaim, and no one could understand what had prompted her to disappear out of the public eye without telling anyone where she'd gone. Some people assumed she was dead, others that she was just doing it for attention. Whatever the reason, it wasn't every day million selling novelists dumped their cars at Dover and slipped away, never to be seen again.

The months rolled on and Patty didn't return. The longer it went on, the more people were willing to accept she may have taken her own life. Her last novel 'Two Hearts' had been a departure from the raunch she was famous for, and had been a complete flop. In 1978 she'd published her first book 'The Tale of Jezebel Cole' – the story of a high-class prostitute who marries a rich Arab and briefly steps into respectability. It had been an overnight success and the thirteen subsequent novels telling of all her exploits had shot Patty into the stratosphere, and now she was second only to Jackie Collins in terms of book sales. Her novels had been translated into fifty different languages and made into Hollywood mini series and films. People had come to love her frank, explicit style of writing, and there had been widespread condemnation when she'd released 'Two Hearts' - a tale of star-crossed lovers in the years around the First World War. There had been no sex and no swearing. There was even speculation that it had been written by someone else - that Patty had lost the ability to write and maybe that was what had driven her to end it all.

No one knew the truth; and while the public joked about it, as they stood by their water coolers and at bus stops, in reality, Patty had left behind three women who were equally puzzled and bereft. Her daughters, Sasha, Rorie and Dana also had no idea where their mother had gone. She'd told them she had to meet someone in Paris, and they'd assumed she would travel on one of her friends' private jets. When it had appeared she'd chosen the more down-market Cross Channel ferry, it made no sense. If there was one thing Patty appreciated, that was luxury, and she wouldn't be seen dead on a ferry, having to mix with the hoi polloi. While none of the girls could claim to have ever been close to their mother, she had been the one constant in their lives, and now she was gone. Without admitting it to one another, they knew they had to face the prospect of her being dead and none of them wanted to do that.

CHAPTER ONE

April 2009

Sasha Fletcher stepped out of the London Studios, and for a moment the bright sunlight hit her eyes and made her wince. She'd spent the morning ensconced in a tiny studio filled with artificial light and the stifling heat of cameras and electrical cables; and to be greeted with real life was a bit of a shock to the system. The reason she was here was that she'd been invited to do an interview with Natasha Murray – the queen of daytime television. Her show went out live every morning, and was usually dedicated to the shenanigans of the great unwashed who were demanding free DNA tests to prove paternity, or lie detectors to ensure someone had not been cheating. Ratings had been dropping of late and it had been a scoop to get an interview with the daughter of Patty Belleville.

Sasha had hated every minute of it. Unlike her mother, she had no desire to be famous. Even being married to a Premiership footballer hadn't changed that. Sasha shunned the WAG lifestyle, and there was more likelihood of her going to a BNP meeting than having hair extensions or her nails done; and to spend a morning under such close scrutiny had been uncomfortable and unpleasant.

Thinking she would have to catch a cab to take her to Victoria, she received a shock when an Audi TT roared up beside her. She immediately recognised it as one of her younger sister Rorie's fleet of cars. Rorie Chase was one of the world's highest paid models, and most of her money went on fast cars – and maintaining the stream of unsuitable, sponging boyfriends who seemed to gravitate towards her.

The window slid down, and Rorie stuck her head out, pushing her sunglasses back over her hair.

'Fancy a lift?' she asked.

'Where did you spring from?'

'I was just doing a shoot down the road and I saw you on TV. I thought you might like a lift back to the station.'

Sasha was rather taken aback by her sister's altruism. Rorie could never be described as generous or particularly caring. Out of the three sisters, she was the one most like Patty.

The only thing Sasha had in common with Rorie was her height and build. Both were tall and slim, and as Sasha folded her body into the small car, she wondered what pleasure her sister got from driving it. Indeed, Rorie had the front seat pushed back rather far, just so her feet could reach the pedals. It seemed like rather a lot of effort just to show off.

'How come you agreed to do the interview?' she asked, moving off.

'I don't know,' Sasha pondered, looking out at the concrete jungle that surrounded them. 'I suppose as the eldest I felt I should do something.'

Rorie glanced round at her and nodded approvingly.

‘You look nice.’

Her tone said it all and Sasha had never felt more frumpy. She was wearing her only designer outfit - a dark brown Prada trouser suit she’d bought to attend a football awards ceremony with Luca in 2004. When she’d turned up at the studio with her frizzy hair tied back in a ponytail, the hairdresser had ranted for half an hour that she could not believe Sasha was Patty Belleville’s daughter, as Patty always took so much time on her appearance. Trying to ignore the insults, Sasha had sat there while her hair was straightened into a sort of bob. The make up artist had been more complimentary and had cooed about her fabulous cheekbones and big brown eyes, and by the time she was finished, Sasha looked quite stunning.

Even so, she could never compete with Rorie. To look at her younger sister, no-one would ever guess their mother was mixed race - except perhaps for the natural tan to her skin. Rorie had inherited her father’s blue eyes and fair hair; and while it was naturally curly (although Brazilian blow-dries always kept it straight), she had none of the afro frizziness that had plagued Sasha all her life.

But then Rorie knew who her father was, and knew she’d inherited his looks. Jonathan Chase was a famous actor - a heart-throb when he’d married the newly famous Patty Belleville; and with her exotic beauty and his Nordic looks, everyone knew their baby was going to be a stunner. No one paid any attention to the five year old daughter Patty already had. The little girl who didn’t know who her father was. All her mother would tell her was that he was a bad man who beat her and made her run away to a women’s refuge - where Sasha was born. Sasha guessed he must have been white, as she was far paler than Patty, and her features were European. But she just wished her mother would just tell her something about him – good or bad; just so she could draw a picture of him in her head. Rorie had a dad around, and even Dana – the result of a fling Patty had with a nineteen year old American surfer called Chad Perry - knew her father was on the other side of the Atlantic and could be contacted any time she wanted. Sasha had no one; and now it looked like Patty had gone forever, it seemed she was never going to find out.

‘That Natasha Murray’s a nosy bitch,’ Rorie said. ‘Why did she ask all that about Mum’s childhood?’

‘I guess she just wanted to see if there was any chance she would go back to her old haunts.’

‘Well she made you look like a complete idiot. You couldn’t tell her anything.’

‘Thanks Rorie.’

‘No I don’t mean you are an idiot. None of us really know much about Mum do we? It’s just that it made us look like a really crap family who never talk to each other.’

‘We *are* a crap family. You, me and Dana hardly ever see each other. Our mother’s disappeared and not thought to tell us where she’s gone. Dana’s convinced she’s been murdered. You’re positive it’s a publicity stunt, and I think she’s lost her mind. Just shows how much we all knew her, seeing as we can’t agree.’

‘It is a publicity stunt Sash. Do you remember when Mum had that *lesbian* affair with Abigail Burns? In reality she was shagging that wanker Ahmed; and Abigail Burns had a film coming out about a killer dyke. But it got publicity for her and caused a stir about Mum. And lo and behold, the next book that comes out, Jezebel toys with lesbianism. I tell you Sash, Mum could teach Jordan a thing or two about all publicity being good publicity.’

‘I’m not convinced. What was *Two Hearts* all about? Why did Mum write such a soppy novel?’

‘Fuck knows. Perhaps it was just a quota filler for the publisher. Who can say? But I bet that by the end of the year, she’ll miraculously reappear and we’ll find out she’s been sunning herself in Mustique or something.’

Sasha wasn’t convinced, and as she sat on the train back to Surrey, she pressed her aching forehead against the cool window and closed her eyes, thinking over her life with Patty. It was true what Rorie had said, she *had* appeared vague in the interview with Natasha Murray. After all, everyone felt they knew Patty Belleville - the larger than life author famed for her raunchy books and over the top persona. Everyone thought she *was* Jezebel Cole, and that by reading of her exploits they were somehow getting a glimpse of the real Patty. But were they?

All Sasha knew of her mother’s history was that she was the daughter of an English singer and a black American jazz musician. Her mother, Molly Keegan, had disowned her when she was sixteen (she never said why), and in 1976, when she was twenty, she became pregnant for Sasha by a man she never named. She claimed he beat her and forced her to flee to a woman’s refuge in Hammersmith, and shortly after Sasha’s birth, the Patty Belleville fairy tale began. The owner of the home was the daughter of a famous publisher and when she read the first draft of *The Tale of Jezebel Cole*, she passed it to her father and he immediately offered Patty a publishing contract. Everything from then on was in the public domain – the affairs; the three daughters by different fathers; the flirtation with lesbianism. But something had caused Patty to disappear. Something had made her write that boring love story that she knew would be commercial suicide. Perhaps if Sasha could discover why her mother had done this, she’d come closer to finding out where she’d gone.

By the time she got home, Luca was back from training. He’d left his muddy kit on the middle of the kitchen floor - telling her to wash it without uttering a single word. Sometimes Sasha wished she could be like the other wives and girlfriends, and hire a team of servants to do the work while she dedicated herself to her appearance and socialising; but it wasn’t in her nature to be idle. If things had been different, by now, at thirty-three she would have had at least a couple of kids to look after; but nature hadn’t blessed them with children. Luca blamed her - after all, he’d proven himself at just seventeen by fathering Kylie, his daughter who lived with them. And because he already had a child, he told Sasha he had no desire to try IVF. In his eyes, she’d raised Kylie since she was eight, and he couldn’t understand why she wanted a child of her own.

Like a robot, Sasha loaded the washing machine and made herself a pot of coffee, getting a cup out for Luca. She wasn’t sure where he was, but guessed he was probably downstairs in the swimming pool. He usually liked to unwind after training by pushing his body even further. At thirty-five, his career as a premiership footballer was coming to an end. He’d spent ten years at

Chelsea before succumbing to a vicious hamstring injury in 2003, and shortly afterwards Jose Mourinho took over and considered him a liability, and he was sold to Sutton Town FC for thirty million pounds. Even with his abilities as a star striker, it wasn't enough to stop them hurtling towards relegation. Sasha knew if they went down, the first sacrifice would be her husband. But she didn't even want to think about that, because Luca would make her life a misery.

Pouring Luca a cup of coffee, Sasha took the rest of the pot and retreated into her studio. Since leaving art college, she'd worked as an illustrator of children's books and had her name in more published works than even her mother. It was the perfect career for Sasha – solitary and imaginative. She preferred to live in her head, and she guessed she got that from Patty. After all, she must have imagined Jezebel Cole to start off with, before she morphed into her herself.

There was a knock on the studio door, and before Sasha could say anything, it opened. Luca walked in, and when Sasha saw him, it was as though she was viewing him for the first time. It was always like that with Luca. He was a total bastard and they barely had a conversation these days that didn't escalate into an argument; but it didn't stop her finding him gorgeous. He'd inherited his Italian mother's dark hair, green eyes and olive skin; and standing there, with his top off, exposing his athletic body Sasha could only look at him with a mixture of lust, regret and bewilderment, wondering exactly what he saw in her. Men like him married girls like Rorie, not bookish artists who could hardly be bothered to wear make up or dress nice.

'Thanks for the coffee,' he said, raising the cup to her.

'No worries.'

'How did the interview go?'

'Rorie reckoned I looked like some sort of moron because I couldn't answer questions about my mother's life.'

'Maybe she should have done the interview then, not left it all up to you as usual.'

'I'm the eldest, it's my job.'

'I'm surprised Dana didn't want to do it; that girl'll do anything to get her face on telly. What is it at the moment? Celebrity Sewage Worker?'

'She's training to be a make up artist with a load of other celebrities. I'm hoping she gets a career out of it.'

'But what makes her a celebrity? That's what I'd like to know. She's famous for being Patty Belleville's daughter. For her mother taking her to parties dressed like a slut when she was fifteen. She..'

'That's enough,' snapped Sasha. 'I'm quite aware of what my sister's like. I don't need you reminding me.'

'Okay Okay. I just wanted to let you know I won't be home tonight. It's Tyrone's birthday and he's throwing a party at Chinawhite. I thought I'd stay at a hotel rather than come in and bother you and Kylie.'

Sasha didn't respond. The house was so big, she could sleep on one side of it and Luca could creep in and sleep on the other, and she wouldn't even hear him enter. But she didn't argue. If she did, she would end up saying something she'd regret; like expressing her fears that he was having an affair. Maybe it really was his team-mate's birthday. Maybe he wasn't lying.

'Do you want dinner before you go?' was all she managed to say.

'No, I'll grab a Maccy D's in town. Anyway, I'll leave you to it.'

He retreated, closing the door behind him. Sasha cursed herself, wishing she was more assertive. Luca treated the house like a hotel, and her like an unpaid washer woman, cook and nanny. Thankfully Kylie was nearly eighteen and perfectly able to look after herself; but it hadn't always been like that. When her mother had decided she wanted to go off to LA to pursue her modelling career, she'd dumped the little girl on the newlyweds, and Sasha had gone out of her way not to play the Wicked Stepmother. It was easy enough, as Kylie was a lovely kid, but it could have all turned out so differently.

Luca went out at five, dressed in his favourite Armani suit, hair slicked back, stinking of Aramis. As he left, his daughter came in, joining Sasha in the kitchen.

'Where's Dad off to?' she asked, tossing her satchel onto a chair.

'It's Tyrone Carpenter's birthday apparently and they're having a party at Chinawhite. I wasn't invited of course.'

'Sash I think you're far too clever to want to spend an evening with a bunch of boneheaded footballers and the orange bimbos who are trying to get into their pants.'

'You're probably right,' Sasha laughed. 'Do you want something to eat?'

'Could you fix me a sandwich? I want to get on with my biology homework. I've got to write an essay on photosynthesis. How interesting?'

'It will be when you're a doctor. You'll be able to look back on all these boring essays and laugh.'

'I hope you're right.'

Kylie got on the phone to one of her friends, while Sasha fixed her a tuna mayo sandwich. Rorie always nagged Sasha about trying to persuade Kylie to do modelling. She was a stunning girl with her father's jet black hair and her mother's model figure. But Kylie wasn't interested. She respected Sasha as a role model and realised there was more to being a woman than looking pretty and was determined to become a doctor. She didn't even plaster on make up like her friends did; she was naturally beautiful and Sasha wasn't surprised there was always a succession of boys knocking on the door, asking to take her out. The last one had been an undergraduate called Jeremy. Sasha thought he was far too much of a drip for her step-daughter, but she remembered what it was like to be eighteen and finding your feet where men were concerned.

With Kylie in her room and Luca out for the night, Sasha took the opportunity to get on with her latest assignment. She was illustrating a book about pixies, written by an author called Kitty

Jefferies, who was being tipped as the new Beatrix Potter. Sasha sat in a world of her own, sketching and listening to Kate Bush on her iPod. She was so ensconced in *The Hounds of Love*, she didn't hear the front door bell ring and jumped out of her skin when the studio door opened and Kylie walked in.

'Sash there's a man here to see you,' she said.

'Who is it?' Sasha asked, removing her earphones.

'He says his name is William Morton. I've no idea who he is.'

'Is he a friend of your father's?'

'No, he's asking for you.'

Sasha put down her pencil and iPod and followed her step-daughter out into the hall. Standing in the middle of it was a man. She estimated him to be in his fifties; tall and wearing a tailored suit and expensive looking shoes. He clutched a document case close to his chest and she caught him off-guard, looking up at the huge chandelier Luca had had imported from France.

'Can I help you?' Sasha asked.

He jumped a little and turned around. He was a pleasant looking man with short, silver hair, bright blue eyes and a neat moustache. Sasha had absolutely no idea who he was.

'Sasha,' he said, smiling. His teeth were far too Hollywood white for someone his age and it was obvious he had money, 'My name's William Morton. I was wondering if I could talk to you about your mother.'

'Are you a journalist?'

'No. I knew her when we were kids.'

'Okay.' Sasha looked at Kylie and told her it was okay, and the young girl leapt up the stairs. William watched her go.

'Is she your daughter?'

'Step-daughter. Would you like to come into the kitchen?'

Sasha led William into the kitchen and he seated himself on one of the sofas that ran along the far wall. Sasha asked him if he wanted coffee and he replied he'd prefer tea. He was well-spoken and gave an air of intelligence, and it fitted that Patty would have known someone like this when she was growing up. She did, after all, claim to come from a wealthy family.

'I saw your interview this morning,' he said. 'I could see you were struggling at times.'

'Yes, well my mother *is* missing. What do you expect?'

'No I don't mean that. I mean, there seemed to be things you couldn't answer. I felt I had to see you, so I contacted Patty's agent and he told me where you lived.'

Sasha brought him his tea and sat beside him, a part of her wanting to hear what he had to say; another part of her frightened, wondering exactly what secrets her mother had been keeping.

‘How did you know Mum?’ she asked.

‘I used to live near her in Notting Hill. We were really good friends, best friends for a time. Then she disappeared.’

‘Disappeared? What do you mean disappeared?’

‘She left home when she was sixteen and I never heard from her again. As soon as she became famous as Patty Belleville, I recognised her, but I never contacted her. She wouldn’t have changed her name had she wanted people to know who she was.’

‘I know so little about her life before she had me. She always said my grandmother disowned her when she was sixteen, but she never said why. Do you know what happened?’

‘Molly never disowned Patsy,’ he scoffed, using a name Sasha had never heard her mother called. ‘Molly was arrested shortly afterwards and by the time she got out of prison Patsy had gone.’

‘Prison? What are you talking about?’

The humour left William’s face as he realised he was dropping a massive bombshell upon this young woman. It was obvious her mother had kept so much of her early life a secret from her.

‘I’m so sorry. I thought you knew,’ he uttered.

‘Knew what?’

‘About your grandmother. About the brothel.’

‘What brothel? What are you talking about?’

He looked away, his hands shaking as he held his teacup. He laid it upon the table before him.

‘I feel so terrible now. I’m so sorry. I didn’t realise how little you knew.’

‘Patty said her mother was a singer and her father a black American jazz musician, and that they were wealthy and my grandmother disowned Patty when she was sixteen and she made her own way in the world.’

‘Your grandmother was a prostitute Sasha. I’m so sorry to tell you that, I really am. Molly ran a brothel on Talbot Road.’

‘A-And my grandfather?’

‘He was a Trinidadian who was killed in the Notting Hill Riots in 1958, when Patsy was two. Legend had it that when he died, Molly turned to drink and then to prostitution.’

‘I’m speechless,’ Sasha uttered. She felt so stupid. It was as though Patty was in the room with her; taunting her, laughing at how gullible she’d been to fall for her ridiculous story about being some discarded heiress. She was the daughter of a whore.

‘The reason I’m here is because when that woman was asking you why Patsy wrote *Two Hearts*, you weren’t able to tell her. I thought I’d give you something to help you.’

He opened the case he’d been carrying and pulled out a manuscript. It was yellowing and gnarled and held together by treasury tags. He passed it to Sasha and when she laid it upon her lap, she could see it was a book. The front cover was of two hearts drawn in red biro and the title written in black pen. ‘*Two Hearts by Patricia Keegan*’. At the bottom it was dated ‘May 1972’.

‘Patsy wrote that for me,’ he said. ‘It’s virtually the exact same story as the novel she published last year.’

‘She wrote it for you?’

He looked down, seemingly ashamed.

‘Patsy thought she was in love with me. I adored her but she wasn’t the type of girl I could go out with. She wrote me this and the next month, just after her sixteenth birthday, she disappeared. It was only after she’d gone that I read it. She’d cast me as this dashing World War One officer and herself as a nurse from the other side of the tracks, and we fall in love and everyone is against us. It’s quite beautiful and you wouldn’t believe it was written by a fifteen year old. When the other one came out I bought a copy and couldn’t understand why everyone was being horrible about it. My wife read a few of the Jezebel books, and when I glanced at them I thought they were dreadful. To me *Two Hearts* was written by Patsy Keegan, the sweet girl I knew.’

‘Is there anywhere you have to be Mr Morton?’ Sasha asked.

‘No,’ he replied. ‘I’m fine.’

‘Good. Would you stay for a while? Tell me more about my mother?’

‘It would be a pleasure,’ he smiled.

CHAPTER TWO

London - Summer 1970

Everyone in Talbot Road knew Patsy Keegan was out and about without even seeing her. She always rode around on her bike with her radio fixed on the front, and today it was blasting out *In The Summertime* by Mungo Jerry. No one minded. It was a glorious sunny day, and as everyone milled around Notting Hill, they enjoyed the sounds coming from the pretty girl on the bicycle. It all seemed so appropriate.

Patsy had been to Ladbroke Grove to pick up some groceries for her mother's friend Claudine. Unlike most of the black women around here, she didn't straighten her hair by using hot irons or going to have it steamed at the hairdresser. Instead she used this gloopy, smelly glue stuff that was imported from America and could only be brought at Errol's Store in the Grove. He sold lots of exotic sounding products and once gave Patsy some oil to smooth her frizzy hair down. All it did was make her hair hang around her face like rats tails and it stank to high heaven. Claudine reckoned it hadn't worked because while Patsy had the frizziness of her father's hair, she had the fine texture of her mother's, and so it had just swamped it. Now she just used a bit of Vaseline to keep it from going too mad.

She got home to find the house stinking of pot. Claudine smoked it like other people smoked Benson & Hedges. She was sprawled out on the sofa, her red satin hot pants digging into her fat thighs, one of her breasts on the verge of spilling from her halter neck top. Molly was in front of the mirror over the electric fire, spraying Elnet all over her shocking red hair. Patsy had no idea what her mother's natural colour was, but she guessed it wasn't that horrible rusty orange. No one had hair like that.

'You're going to have to go back out Patricia,' Molly said, and it amazed Patsy how her mother had been in England for over twenty years and yet her Dublin accent was so strong it sounded as though she'd just stepped off the boat. 'We have some gentlemen coming here and we need your room.'

Patsy groaned to herself. She'd planned on spending the afternoon in her room writing her latest story. Her heroine Jessica Cole was a poor girl who becomes rich when her long lost aunt dies and leaves her all her money. With it she goes to boarding school, where at first she doesn't fit in, then she wins a show-jumping tournament and suddenly everyone loves her. Writing was Patsy's escape and almost like a friend to her – someone she could confide in when life became really unbearable.

Apart from Susan Clapp who lived at number eleven, Patsy had no real friends in Talbot Road. No one wanted to be pals with the girl who lived in the brothel. Instead she lived in her head, and Jessica Cole had become her best friend. In fact Jessica lived the life Patsy wanted. She was white, blonde, pretty, went to a posh school, had ponies and was happy. She didn't live in a stinking house in the middle of West London, populated by prostitutes and the men who visited them.

'I'll see if Susan's in,' she pouted and slunk out of the room, dropping Claudine's pot of hair relaxer beside her on the sofa.

Stepping out into the sunshine, Patsy soon forgot her woes and decided to knock for Susan. Like Patsy, she was an outcast. She'd been born with one working arm and the other just a withered stump below the elbow. The other kids at North Kensington Secondary Modern all took the piss out of her, and one day Patsy had had enough and jumped to her defence, offering to punch each and every one of them out. Normally people laughed at the skinny little half-caste kid, but there was something in her ferocity that scared them - like a tiny, snapping terrier dog, and they backed off. From then on, although Susan and Patsy were teased, the bullying had stopped; most of the kids feeling these two misfits weren't even worth bothering with.

She didn't have to look far for her friend. Susan was outside her house, pushing her brother Wayne's pram with her good arm. She looked as though she wanted to be anywhere but there; half-heartedly soothing the crying baby, whilst looking down the other end of the street. Patsy thought it was a shame Susan only had one arm. She was quite pretty otherwise, with long blonde hair and a sweet face. Even as she was, boys still looked at her.

As if sensing her friend's presence, she turned around and smiled.

'Hello Pats,' she said. 'Where you off to?'

'Dunno. Anywhere. Mum's got people in.'

'Ere, take a look at 'im.'

Susan indicated to where she'd been looking before, and Patsy followed her gaze. Leaning against the wall of number thirty-three was a boy. Patsy didn't recognise him. He certainly looked different to most of the scruffs down this street. He was very tall and looked quite comical in his tight t-shirt and jeans that flared out wider than his body! His hair was long and the same dark blonde as Susan's. He seemed to be in a world of his own, smoking a cigarette and staring into space.

'How old do you reckon he is?' Susan asked.

'Dunno. Looks like he's older than us.'

At fourteen, most of the boys in their year at school were still the same height as Patsy and Susan - and they were both only 5'1! This boy had to be at least six foot tall and he looked like a giant.

Suddenly realising he was being watched; the boy turned around and spotted the two girls. He raised his hand and nodded and like the schoolgirls they were, Patsy and Susan put their heads together and started giggling. Despite living in a house where men came and went; Molly had always protected Patsy, and she was almost as innocent as any other fourteen year old where men were concerned. Besides, she could never equate boys her own age with the older men who visited the brothel.

When the boy left his spot and started walking towards the girls, Patsy felt herself blush from head to toe. Now she could see him face on, she could see he was quite good-looking, with a nicely boned face and a healthy looking tan. She suddenly felt scruffy in her mini dress covered

in daisies. Her knees were dirty and one of the straps was broken on her flip-flops. She wished she could just close her eyes and magic herself into Jessica Cole.

‘Hello girls,’ he said, in a deep, well-spoken voice. Patsy couldn’t believe someone posh had moved into Talbot Road.

‘Hello,’ Susan replied. ‘Have you moved in down here?’

‘Yes. My parents and I have just moved into number thirty-three.’

He sat on the wall next to Susan, and Patsy could only stare at him. He was so pretty and perfect. Like a male version of how she wanted to be.

‘I’m William,’ he said. ‘What are your names?’

‘I’m Susan and this is Patsy.’

He looked at Patsy and smiled and she quickly looked away, blushing once more.

‘Hello Patsy. Do you both live here too?’

‘Yeah,’ Susan continued. ‘I live at number eleven and Patsy lives at number five. Where did you live before?’

‘Well I was at school in Dorset and my parents lived in Exeter. But my dad’s got a post at the University of London and we’ve come to live here.’

‘Why here?’ Patsy couldn’t help but blurt out. She then clamped her mouth shut, feeling she’d been rude.

‘Why not here?’

‘Well it ain’t very posh is it?’

‘Mum and Dad wanted to mix with real London people. Besides I’m starting at a very good sixth form college in North Kensington in September.’

‘Are you sixteen then?’ Susan asked.

‘Yes. I was sixteen on the tenth of this month.’

‘That’s my birthday too!’ Patsy exclaimed. ‘Except I was fourteen.’

‘So have you got to go back to school in Dorset on Monday then?’ Susan frowned.

‘No,’ he laughed. ‘I sat my last exam on Tuesday. I’m finished now until September.’

‘You lucky thing. Me and Pats have got to stay at North Ken until the middle of July.’

He looked at Wayne, fast asleep in the pram.

‘Who’s baby is that?’

‘It’s my brother,’ Susan replied. ‘Mum was fed up with him crying, so she told me to come out here and give him some air.’

William got a tobacco tin from his back pocket and on opening it, Patsy could see it contained several ready rolled cigarettes. He offered them to the girls.

‘My mum would kill me if I smoked,’ Susan said.

‘So would my mum,’ Patsy agreed. ‘But I do it behind her back.’

‘Do you?’ William laughed.

‘Yeah. Liza, one of Mum’s.....lodgers lets me smoke them in the back yard when Mum’s out.’

‘Why don’t you both come back to mine?’ he suggested. ‘I’ve got that new Kinks record.’

‘I can’t,’ Susan replied ruefully. ‘I’ve got to keep Wayne out while Mum chats to Uncle Malcolm.’

‘I’ll come,’ Patsy said eagerly. ‘If you don’t mind.’

‘Course I don’t.’ He looked at Susan and touched her shoulder and Patsy saw her friend visibly shudder at his touch. ‘If you change your mind, just come in,’ he said.

Feeling a bit bad about leaving Susan on her own, Patsy followed her new acquaintance into his house. William was unlike anyone she had ever met before and couldn’t believe someone posh like him had invited her into his home. She hoped he wouldn’t ask her too many questions about herself. She’d be too embarrassed to answer truthfully.

Number thirty-three had previously been occupied by an old lady called Mrs Robertson, and after she died and her son sold it, the residents had been curious to know who the new occupants would be. A succession of builders and painters and decorators had traipsed in and out, and now Patsy felt very privileged to be one of the first people to see the results.

The hall was bright, painted white; the floor black and white like a chequerboard. The door to the front room was open, and as she glanced in, her breath was taken away by the coloured drapes and fancy cushions scattered all over the floor. Incense had been burnt at some point - Patsy recognised the smell. Her mother had gone through a phase of using it, but back in number five, all it had done was mix with the other unpleasant smells that filled the house. But in here it mingled with the newly polished wood and the faint smell of baking, and helped create a welcoming atmosphere.

Like Patsy, William’s bedroom was at the top of the house. But unlike her, he had a massive room, and a bathroom all to himself. Patsy had to share one dingy bathroom with her mother; the girls who worked there *and* the customers. William had two rooms knocked into one. At one end, near the window, was a huge desk with lots of electrical components all over it. At the other end was his bed; a sofa; a record player and one wall covered in posters of pretty girls in bikinis and their underwear. He told Patsy to sit on the sofa and she did so, watching as he took out a cigarette and lit it for her.

‘Do you want a drink?’ he asked. ‘My parents brought some Ouzo back from Greece. It tastes a bit weird but it’s good stuff.’

‘Okay,’ Patsy replied. Not sure what she was letting herself in for. She was here in a house with a boy she didn’t know, and he was about to give her alcohol. She sucked hard on the cigarette and waited for him to come back from the kitchen. He returned with two tumblers filled with orange squash, and a bottle of clear alcohol tucked under his arm.

Putting the glasses on the table next to his bed, he poured the alcohol into the orange squash and passed a glass to Patsy. Tasting it, at first she found it sweet and cloying. Then suddenly her nose was filled with the scent of aniseed, and it was strangely revolting but compelling at the same time.

William went over to his record player and put the needle back to the beginning of the disc that was on it. Within moments that familiar sinister guitar strum kicked in, and Ray Davies started singing. *Lola* had been the talk of the school playground. All the boys reckoned it was about a man who goes to bed with a man dressed as a woman, and all the girls would squeal and insist they were wrong because that was disgusting and would never happen. They refused to believe such men existed, and Patsy would just keep quiet and not tell them about Mr Collins, who would come to the house in his pin stripe suit, and emerge from one of the bedrooms in a red satin nightie, blonde wig and high heels and insist on being called Nancy. He was the only client Molly would allow Patsy to talk to. He never wanted sex, he just liked to sit in the lounge room at the back of the house with the other ‘real’ girls, while Patsy served him champagne. Molly would always give Patsy half a crown for doing this, which she would then spend on exercise books to write her adventures of Jessica Cole.

William sat on the floor before her and lit himself a cigarette, taking a big sip of his drink.

‘What do you think of it?’ he asked.

‘It’s a bit sickly but it’s good.’

William nodded his head to the music, his shiny hair falling over his face.

‘Do you know what this song’s about?’ he asked.

‘I-I’m not sure,’ she whispered.

‘It’s about a boy who goes to a nightclub and meets this woman, and when he goes home with her, he discovers she’s actually a man. But by then he fancies him so much he goes to bed with him anyway.’

‘It’s very rude,’ Patsy laughed.

‘I’m going to learn how to play it on the guitar.’

‘You have a guitar?’

‘Yes, it’s still in its case down in the cellar at the moment. I’m going to find out if any of the boys at college are interested in forming a band.’

Patsy couldn't reply. He was so beautiful and exciting and lived in this gorgeous house and she couldn't believe she was in here drinking and smoking with him. Suddenly Susan with her shabby house and five brothers and sisters and life as miserable as her own, seemed very unappealing, and she wished she could spend every moment of her day with William.

'Where are your parents from?' he asked, dragging on his cigarette.

'My dad was from Trinidad, my mum's from Dublin.'

'Where's your dad?'

'He was killed when I was two. Some Teddy boys beat him to death.'

'Bastards,' he hissed, breathing out a stream of smoke from his nostrils. 'Did they ever get them?'

'No. I don't s'pose the police were very interested in someone killing a black man.'

'That's bad. Have you got any brothers or sisters?'

'No it's just me and Mum. What about you?'

'I've an older sister, Juliet. She's at Cambridge.'

'Is that where you're gonna go?'

'I don't know. I really want to study electronics so I'll go where there's the best course.'

'Electronics?'

'Umm,' he nodded, his blue eyes twinkling with excitement. 'I like inventing things. Come and see this.'

He got up and Patsy followed him. The carpet felt spongy and the room seemed to be spinning, and she realised the Ouzo had gone straight to her head. William led her over to the table by the window, where all his gadgets lay. A box filled with wires and metal screws was connected up to an ordinary telephone. Patsy had never seen anything like it.

'What's that?' she asked.

'My document machine. I'm going to wire an electric typewriter up to it and devise a way of sending documents over telephone wires.'

'Why would someone want to do that?'

'Just imagine it Patsy. It's Friday and you've left school for the day and you realise you haven't handed in your homework. So instead of waiting until Monday and handing it in late and getting a detention, you just feed it into your machine, and a copy of it goes to school for your teacher to pick up.'

'Sounds amazing. You can really make that?'

‘I’m going to give it a try.’ He laughed. ‘Dad bought me a train set that you had to wind up once. I ended up putting a little motor on it and making it go all by itself.’

‘So you want to be an inventor when you grow up?’

‘Yes. What about you? What do you want to be?’

‘A writer. I write stories.’

‘Really? Fantastic. I’m glad I’ve met you Patsy. I thought I was going to be all by myself here in Notting Hill.’

Patsy really felt the need to sit back down again, and made her way over to the sofa, lowering herself down gently. William sat beside her.

‘Are you okay? Do you want some water?’

‘No I’ll be fine. This is strong stuff. Won’t your parents mind you drinking it?’

‘They won’t notice it’s gone, they’ve got about eight bottles of the stuff down in the cellar.’

‘Where are they?’

‘Mum’s out buying fabric for curtains, and Dad’s down in Exeter picking up the last of his stuff.’

‘What does he do?’

‘He lectures in physics. It’s him I get my love of tinkering from.’

Their conversation was halted by the street door slamming and a call of;

‘William, are you in darling?’

‘It’s my mum,’ he gasped, shoving the ouzo bottle under the bed.

‘Shall I leave?’ Patsy asked.

‘Don’t be silly.’ He looked to the door. ‘I’m up here Mum.’

‘What about the fags?’

‘Oh she knows all about that,’ he replied nonchalantly. ‘Drink up.’

Patsy gulped down the rest of the drink and William did the same. He then took her glass and put it with his own, out on the window ledge, in a position where his mother couldn’t see.

Suddenly the air was filled with the smell of the sweetest perfume, and into the room walked a woman. She was stunning - tall and slim like a fashion model; her long, blonde hair parted in the middle, a leather band around her forehead. She wore an Afghan coat and a short dress. Her legs were slim and shapely, and black leather kinky boots came up to her knees. She didn’t look old enough to be William’s mother.

‘Hello darling,’ she said, her smile beaming. ‘Who’s this?’ she asked, looking at Patsy.

‘This is Patsy....’ He looked at Patsy, furrowing his brow.

‘Keegan,’ she said quietly.

‘Patsy Keegan. She lives at number five. Patsy this is my mum.’

‘Pleased to meet you Mrs....’

‘Morton,’ she laughed. ‘And please, call me Rachel.’

‘Pleased to meet you Rachel.’

‘And you Patsy. I’m glad William’s made a friend already.’ She looked at William once more. ‘I’m going to put supper on - I’m making a hot pot. Would you like to stay and eat with us Patsy?’

‘No, I’m fine thank you Mrs...Rachel.’

‘Okay, well can I get you both some orange squash?’

‘No we’re fine thanks Mum,’ William replied, his voice clipped, hoping she couldn’t see the glasses on the windowsill.

‘Okay,’ she smiled. ‘Well if you change your mind...’

She left the room and the smell of perfume gradually faded. William came and sat beside Patsy.

‘That was close,’ he laughed.

‘She looks too young to be your mum.’

‘She had Juliet on the day she graduated when she was twenty-one. It caused a dreadful scandal in her family. She and Dad had to get married and everything.’

‘Does she work?’

‘Umm. She’s an interior designer. People pay her huge sums of money to do up their houses.’

‘Your family are so exciting,’ Patsy gushed with admiration. ‘You’re so lucky.’

‘If you say so,’ he smiled coyly. ‘What about your mum? Does she work?’

‘She takes in lodgers,’ she said rather too quickly.

‘I see. Will she mind you being in here with me?’

‘No, she sent me out. I mean she’s got a friend round and wants some peace and quiet.’

‘Cool. Okay, well why don’t I go and get us a couple of orange squashes and I’ll come back up and play Space Oddity? It’s my favourite record, ever.’

CHAPTER THREE

It was almost midnight by the time William stopped talking, looked at his watch and declared he had to get home. He had told Sasha how he met her mother, and the picture he painted of the scrappy little girl who blushed when he spoke to her was nothing like the harridan Sasha knew. He reminisced about the idyllic summer they spent together - him, Patsy and Susan – her one armed friend; hanging around Notting Hill, or Holland Park - where he would play his guitar and the girls would sing. It was strange to imagine this dapper man ever being a longhaired hippy, playing a guitar and dreaming of being Eric Clapton.

‘I must get home,’ he said. ‘I’m flying to Frankfurt tomorrow.’

‘Are you going there on holiday?’

‘No it’s business I’m afraid.’

‘I’m so sorry, I didn’t ask you what you did?’

‘I own Ring Tel. I developed one of the first mobile phones and made my fortune that way.’

‘Ring Tel? I’ve heard of them. I never imagined my mother was friends with its founder. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me William. It’s certainly been enlightening.’

‘Patsy kept diaries from the time she was a little girl. There must be quite a few of them lying around somewhere, although I don’t know what she did with them.’

‘I never recall her writing in a diary. But Mum could be so secretive, maybe she did so without telling me. Did you ever find out why she left back in 1972?’

‘No. I know I upset her when I told her I was leaving London to go travelling before starting Cambridge. She asked if we could see each other when I came back and I told her we could only ever be friends. By the time I returned from India, Molly’s brothel was closed and Patsy had gone.’

‘Why didn’t you want to go out with her? Was it because of her background?’

‘I’m ashamed to say it, but yes. I was ambitious. I wanted my own company when I left university and I couldn’t imagine anyone taking me seriously with someone like Patsy hanging around in the wings. Besides, Patsy wasn’t my type - I’ve always been a sucker for blondes. But don’t get me wrong, your mother was gorgeous.’

‘And you really think what happened then is connected with her disappearance now?’

‘Well it’s a big coincidence. She wrote Two Hearts for me then disappeared. Now she’s re-written it and disappeared once more.’

‘It’s certainly a mystery. Perhaps my sister’s right and it is a big publicity stunt.’

‘Who knows?’ He reached inside his jacket and pulled out a business card, passing it to Sasha. ‘If you hear anything or want any advice, please call me.’

‘Thank you,’ she smiled. ‘I tell myself I don’t care about her..she wasn’t the best mother. But I can’t help but worry about her.’

‘Of course you can’t. She’s your mum at the end of the day.’

Sasha slept little that night. The bed was cold without Luca and she kept going over what William had told her. She wondered why her mother - who wrote explicit books without any sense of shame - could never tell her daughters that she was raised in a brothel. After all, it wasn’t her fault what Molly did for a living. For a while, Sasha had even fantasised that the lovely William was her father, wondering if it was just that he couldn’t bring himself to admit that he’d slept with Patsy and made her pregnant. But he insisted that he’d last seen her when she was sixteen and Patty had had Sasha when she was nearly twenty, so it wasn’t chronologically possible.

Another thought came into Sasha’s mind. Maybe her father had come back into Patty’s life and frightened her off. Patty had never said his name or what he did, only that he’d been a violent man who’d beaten her. Perhaps he’d returned and threatened her or blackmailed her; wanting money or something and Patty had run away to escape him.

Sasha wondered if she should tell her fears to PC Satchwell, the young officer who’d been assigned to the family whilst the investigation into Patty’s disappearance was taking place. Not that the police had taken it particularly seriously. A half-hearted search for a body and an all points bulletin put out to UK ports had come up with nothing, and the trail had gone cold. Sasha wondered if she told PC Satchwell about her conversation with William and her own fears about her father maybe they would take it more seriously; or would they carry on believing Patty’s disappearance to just be the whim of a middle-aged woman with far too much money and time on her hands.

The following day Sasha made the decision to find her mother’s diaries, and the first place she thought to go was to Darius Whitby, Patty’s agent. Whitby wasn’t one of Sasha’s favourite people; smarmy and grasping, Patty had made him a fortune over the years, and because of this he was her most sycophantic follower. He pandered to her when she was at her most capricious and treated the three girls as though they were irritants to their mother’s glittering career. Sasha hated even being in the same room as him; but she needed answers and he was the person who looked after everything Patty had ever written - the unfinished novels, the finished ones she declared she hated; all the scripts written by various people who had adapted the Jezebel books. They were all in his care, and maybe, just maybe he would have her diaries.

Deciding to be positive and assertive, Sasha didn’t even ring Whitby to make an appointment. If she did, he would no doubt make some excuse not to see her, so she decided to take the bull by the horns and drive up to London to his office in Kensington. Sasha hated driving into London. She always felt she wasn’t aggressive enough to cope with the savvy city drivers, but she wanted to get there fast, and hanging around for the train would just give her time to change her mind.

Leaving a note for Luca and Kylie, she set off. Darius could be as awkward and as prickly as he wanted to be, but she was Patty’s next of kin and while she was missing, she had every right to look into her affairs. If Rorie was right and it was all a publicity stunt, well Sasha could deal with that when it came to light; chastise her mother for causing such grief. But an instinct -

whatever bond was left from the nine months they spent joined together, drove her on to find Patty. Maybe it was a childish need to always know where her mother was. Sasha didn't know, but she wouldn't stop until Patty was found.

Darius Whitby Associates occupied the top floor of a 1930s office block off Kensington High Street. Apparently when Patty first got her contract with Nova Publishing in 1976, they recommended Whitby as her agent and at that time he operated from a dingy basement flat on North End Road. With the profits he made primarily from Patty, he could now afford this prestigious address, along with a New York office to deal with her American publishers, and the various studios that made mini series from her books. Sasha always wondered what the other writers on his books thought of him, when he dedicated so much time to Patty.

Parking her jeep in the multi-storey next door, Sasha braced herself for Darius' acid tongue and made her way into the building. Shelley, the usual receptionist wasn't there and was replaced by a vacuous looking girl who was chewing gum and sending a text message on her phone.

'Can I see Mr Whitby please?' Sasha asked.

'Who is it?' the girl replied, not taking her eyes off the phone.

'Miss Belleville's daughter.'

That got her attention. She looked up at Sasha and for a moment, a look of disappointment flickered across her face. Patty was glamorous at all times, and it must have been quite a let down to see her daughter dressed in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt.

'One moment.'

She called Whitby on the telephone, informing him of his visitor, while Sasha looked around the walls; every one plastered with frames displaying the front covers of Patty's books. Each country seemed to have a different idea of what Jezebel looked like. The American one was Sasha's favourite; it portrayed Jezebel as a red haired, Rita Hayworth type - curvy and seductive. The UK ones had always shown her as a blonde, which was Patty's choice apparently.

Her thoughts were disturbed by a voice.

'Sasha?'

Whitby didn't even pretend to look pleased to see his client's daughter. He was as bouffanted and preened as ever; the handkerchief folded perfectly in the top pocket, the tie immaculately knotted. Sometimes Sasha expected to look down and actually see the oil dripping off him and pooling around his buffed and polished brogues.

'Can I speak to you?' she asked, refusing to be intimidated by him.

'Come into my office.'

Stepping into the finely decorated office her mother had paid for, Sasha could feel Patty in there with them. She wondered if it was because she was dead and her ghost was here. Or was it

that this place was like a shrine to her and her many achievements - whether she was dead or not?

Sasha sat down and Whitby offered her a coffee. She refused and he proceeded to pour himself a cup.

‘A man called here wanting to speak to you. I gave him your address,’ he said.

‘I know, thanks for giving my address out to complete strangers Darius. Anyway, he’s called William Morton and he was a childhood friend of Mum’s. That’s why I want to speak to you.’

Whitby sat opposite her and looked at his watch, indicating that he wasn’t prepared to give her much of his time.

‘William said Mum kept a diary. Are you aware of this?’

He stuck out his bottom lip, shaking his head.

‘Not at all,’ he replied. ‘Why? What do you think is in it?’

‘William knew Mum when she was a girl living in Notting Hill. She wrote the first draft of Two Hearts when she was fifteen, and shortly afterwards she disappeared and William never saw her again. Now she’s written Two Hearts again and she’s run off once more. He also says she kept a diary back then and if we could find it, there might be some clue.’

‘I can’t help you. I’ve got all of Patty’s manuscripts in a vault, but there are no diaries.’

‘Bugger! I don’t know what else to do.’

‘Leave it to the police. It’s their job.’

‘They’re not interested. She’s a grown woman, and as far as they’re concerned she can do as she likes. But you know my mother; this is totally out of character.’

‘Why did she disappear when she was a teenager?’

‘No idea. William doesn’t know either. If I could just find those diaries....’

Whitby flicked through a Roladex on his desk, taking out a business card and copying the information on it onto a post-it note.

‘A couple of years ago I thought James was having an affair so I hired a private investigator to follow him. Why don’t you ring her?’

He ripped off the post-it note and passed it to Sasha. It read;

Phillipa Hardcastle 07917118111

‘Thanks,’ she replied, rather shocked at his kindness. ‘Where is she based?’

‘Just down the road in West Ken. I think her speciality is errant partners, but she might be able to help, or know someone who can.’

Sasha left the office and went back to the multi-storey; getting into her car and still reeling from Whitby's benevolence. She guessed it was probably because he feared if Patty was never found, there would be no more novels and no more commission for him.

Sasha clutched the post-it note and looked at it, wondering if she really wanted to involve a private investigator. The police might not be happy about someone else treading on their toes, and she wasn't sure if this woman could even be trusted to keep a confidence – Patty was a public figure after all. But at the end of the day Sasha had no idea how to find things or people, and knew she had no choice but to seek professional help.

Taking a deep breath, she called the number and found herself nervous, wondering what she was going to say.

Suddenly it was answered.

'Phillipa Hardcastle.'

For some reason Sasha was surprised by the woman's clipped, upper class tones. She wasn't sure what she'd been expecting – some sort of female version of Mike Hammer?

'Oh hello. I've been given your name by a man called Darius Whitby. You did a job for him a while back when he thought his partner was cheating on him.'

'Yes.'

'Well, my mother has gone missing and I need someone to help me find her.'

'How old is your mother?'

'She'll be fifty three in June.'

'Okay, and has she got any mental health issues?'

'Not that I'm aware of.'

'And are the police involved?'

'Yes, but they don't seem very interested.'

'Why doesn't that surprise me? Okay....'

'Sasha.'

'Okay Sasha, why don't you come and see me? Could you do some time today?'

'I'm actually available now.'

'Okay. Well I'm at number three Charterhouse Street. It's off North End Road. I'm above a little dry cleaners.'

'Alright. Well I'll see you soon.'

From the way she spoke, Phillipa Hardcastle sounded as though she would be better suited living in the country, organising gymkhanas and village fetes; not working as a private investigator. She seemed very jolly hockey-sticks, and Sasha wondered if she'd be suitable for maybe investigating the seedier side of Patty's past.

Charterhouse Street was a very quiet road filled with tall townhouses, and at the end were a dry cleaners and a very upmarket looking delicatessen. Beside the door to the cleaners were two bells, the bottom one had a label beside it that said 'Adams'; the one above was printed and said 'Phillipa Hardcastle'. Sasha rang this bell and within moments the intercom crackled into life.

'Hello,' that now familiar horsy voice said.

'Phillipa, it's Sasha Fletcher.'

'Come up.'

She buzzed the door and Sasha let herself into the long, dark hallway. At the end was a flight of stairs, and as she mounted it, a voice from above called *'It's right at the top'*.

Sasha looked up, and over the banisters leaned a young woman, her wavy dark blonde hair hanging down over Sasha's head. Seeing that Phillipa Hardcastle was far younger and prettier than she'd imagined, didn't exactly fill Sasha with confidence. For a difficult task like this, she'd been hoping for some sort of grizzled detective in her forties.

She finally came face to face with her. Phillipa was very tall – model height, with shoulder length, wavy, rather scruffy dark blonde hair; perfect skin; a refined bone structure and huge hazel eyes. Sasha immediately warmed to her, but at the same time made her mind up that she wasn't what she was looking for.

'I've seen you somewhere,' Phillipa said, furrowing her brow and taking Sasha's hand.

'Yes, I was on TV yesterday morning, being interviewed about my mother.'

'That's right! You're Patty Belleville's daughter. Do come in.'

She flounced into the flat and Sasha followed. Phillipa was a big girl. Not an ounce of fat on her, but she had a large frame and looked as though she could take care of herself. Even dressed in a scruffy grey sweatshirt and skinny jeans, she looked as though she was born to wear them, and Sasha guessed she was probably some ex-model who had now reached her thirties and made a living by laying honey traps for cheating husbands.

Her 'office' was at the back of the scruffy little flat. It was a tiny room containing a desk with a PC on; a filing cabinet; a chair and an armchair in an alcove, to which Phillipa directed Sasha.

'Would you like a drink?' she asked.

'Coffee would be good.'

'Coming up.'

She walked out, her heels clicking on the floorboards. Sasha looked around, noticing a pair of high-tech looking binoculars on a shelf in the other alcove, and on the far wall was a photograph of a group of police officers that looked to have been taken on their passing out parade. Sasha presumed Phillipa's husband or brother was one of them.

Sasha also wondered how much Phillipa charged. She'd never hired a PI before and had no idea how much they cost. Her thoughts then turned to Luca. If Phillipa proved to be too fluffy-headed to track down Patty, she could pay her to ensnare Luca. He never could resist a pretty face.

Phillipa returned clutching two steaming mugs of coffee, and kicked the door shut with her foot. She passed Sasha her drink and sat down on the seat in front of her desk.

'I shouldn't confess to watching daytime TV should I?' she laughed, blowing on her drink and sipping it. 'But sometimes my brain doesn't get working until midday.'

'Darius told me you mainly follow unfaithful husbands; so I guess you do a lot of your work at night.'

'Yes. I didn't set myself up so I could follow men and chat to them in sleazy bars; but it's the majority of the work I get.'

'How long have you been a Private Investigator?'

'Four years. I used to work for Whetstone and Co, but I had a disagreement with the boss so I left and set my own company up. I get by, but I'd much prefer to get my teeth into something more meaty.'

'May I ask what made you become a private investigator?'

'When I left the police, I decided I wanted to become a florist. I opened a shop and got so bored, I sold it after six months and went to work for Mr Whetstone.'

'You were a police officer?' Sasha was shocked. Phillipa didn't seem the type.

Phillipa casually waved her hand in the direction of the photograph on the wall.

'I joined up on my seventeenth birthday. My mother almost disowned me. She wanted me to become a show-jumper. My dad wanted me to go to University. I wanted to join the police because Jason Hardcastle the boy next door, who I was absolutely besotted with, was joining. So I did, and I married him!'

'Is he still a policeman?'

Phillipa looked down and Sasha noticed how her shoulders became hunched. This was obviously a sore subject.

'Jason was killed in an armed robbery in 2004. That was when I resigned.'

'I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...'

Phillipa looked up, pursing her lips and blinking the tears away.

‘No, don’t be silly,’ she said. ‘It’s time I stopped getting weepy.’ She shook herself. ‘Anyway. Tell me about your mother. What is it you want me to do?’

‘Well an old friend of hers came to see me last night and he told me things about my mum that I never knew. I might as well tell you the truth; my mum always said that she came from a wealthy family, and she was disowned when she was sixteen. This man, William Morton came to see me and told me the truth. He knew my mum when she was a teenager and apparently what she told me was all lies. Her mum ran a brothel and Patty was brought up in it.’

‘You’re kidding?’

‘Nope. William painted her as this sweet, innocent girl from the wrong side of the tracks. Something must have happened between then and the time I was born, because I only ever remember my mother as a selfish, self-obsessed bitch. He also brought the first ever draft of Two Hearts with him. Patty wrote it for him when she was fifteen, and shortly afterwards she left home and he never heard from her again. He finds it strange that she wrote the second version of the book and then disappeared once more.’

‘Okay,’ Phillipa sighed. ‘Let me get my pad and I’ll make some notes.’

She pulled open the top draw of her desk, and from the mess and chaos she got out a dog-eared jotter pad. Flipping it open to a fresh page, she took a pen from the mug next to her computer, which was crammed with pencils, pens, a ruler and two bottles of Tippex.

‘Right, what happened the day your mum disappeared?’

‘Well I hadn’t seen her for some time - we probably only meet up four or five times a year. My sister Dana could probably tell you more; she lives in the top floor flat of Mum’s house in Chelsea. But she left, sent each of us a text message saying she had to meet someone in Paris and that she would be back shortly and that was it. We all assumed she’d go by a private jet, but her car was found in Dover, so the police assumed she’d gone by ferry. I’m sorry but I can’t imagine that for a moment. Mother hated anything that brought her into contact with the general public, and a cross-Channel ferry would be her idea of hell. Anyway, they checked their records and there was no trace of her ever sailing to France with any of the ferry companies.’

‘What about a private boat? Did she know someone with access to their own boat?’

‘Most of my mother’s friends have their own yachts. But surely one of them would have told us they’d taken her somewhere. Mum’s disappearance is known about all over the world.’

Phillipa scribbled her notes then looked at Sasha once more.

‘Okay, what was her frame of mind shortly before she disappeared? How long before she went had you spoken to her?’

‘I think it was a week or so beforehand. It was Kylie, my stepdaughter’s birthday and Mum had sent her a card and called to find out if it had arrived. She always did things like that, just so we could grovel and thank her. She was a bit down because of the reception of Two Hearts -

Mother was arrogant and thought the public would love whatever she put out, and she couldn't understand why she was being slaughtered. But she was as defiant as ever and said she would come back with something stronger and so rude it would run the risk of breaking the Obscene Publications law.'

'Does she have a close friend? Someone she would confide in?'

'Not really. She does have friends, but I always get the feeling Mum just acts the part of Patty Belleville with them. Do you see what I mean? She plays the diva the whole time and the friends she does have love that. They wouldn't appreciate listening to a middle-aged woman who was maybe having some sort of identity crisis.'

'Do you think Patty could be suffering from memory loss? When I was a probationer we had this man turn up at Kentish Town who reckoned he'd woken up under a railway arch and had no idea who he was. He ended up staying in hospital for about a month until we traced his family.'

'How did you do that?'

'They'd reported him as a missing person. Trouble was, he looked nothing like the photograph they'd given us. In the end we found out who he was by a distinctive tattoo he had. Unfortunately only a few people knew about its existence - if you get my meaning. It took a lot of work to get that one sorted, but it all turned out well in the end. Seems he'd gone to a 'specialist' nightclub, had taken a strong dose of a party drug and it had knocked him out. The bump on his head caused temporary amnesia and the poor fellow was totally lost.'

Sasha said nothing, but she felt a little guilty about her earlier supposition of Phillipa. She may have been young, pretty and a little scatty, but she was obviously very experienced and knew what she was doing.

'I must say I loved your mother's books,' she giggled. 'We used to read them under the covers at school. My favourite character was Suki Millar, the one armed prostitute. I broke my arm when skiing once and all my friends nicknamed me Suki. In fact Laura, my oldest friend still does. What a coincidence you've turned up asking me to find the woman who created her?'

Phillipa's words made a memory spark in Sasha's brain. William had mentioned Patty that had had a friend with one arm, called Susan. They'd been best friends back in Notting Hill. And teenage best friends shared everything.....

'Are you okay?' Phillipa asked.

'Would you say Suki could be a shortened version of Susan?'

'I suppose so, yes.'

'Only William said that Mum had a friend called Susan Clapp who only had one arm. I think she might be the inspiration for Suki. They were friends when Mum was a teenager. Maybe she'd know what happened to make Mum run away.'

'Susan Clapp,' Phillipa nodded. 'It's a start.'

‘I suppose before we do anything we’d better discuss terms. What do you charge?’

‘It’s a hundred pounds per day. If I find your mother it’s an additional five hundred pounds. If I don’t, there’s no fee. Is that okay?’

‘Fine. Money’s no object.’ Sasha laughed self-deprecatingly. ‘I’m married to a premiership footballer. I’m hardly poor.’

‘Yes, I wish Jase was here to meet Luca Fletcher’s wife?’

‘Did he support Chelsea?’

‘Yes. If he was here, he wouldn’t let you go. He’d want to know all about Luca.’

Sasha laughed out loud.

‘I don’t think he’d like to hear what I’ve got to say. But that’s another matter altogether.’

‘Well I’d be more than happy to help you look for Patty. I want you to be involved as well though. You may not have been close to your mother but you still know her better than I do.’

‘True. Okay, I’ll do whatever I can.’

CHAPTER FOUR

September 1970

Summer has a strange effect on some children, in that in a matter of weeks they seem to grow, like blooms flourishing in the sunlight. Patsy was one of those children. In July she had left North Kensington Secondary Modern a scrawny little thing with no boobs, and had only had three periods since starting them just after she turned thirteen. But since July, they had come regularly each month, and her body had started to develop and grow. She was returning to school two inches taller, with a 32B chest and hips that had sprouted from nowhere.

Maybe it was having a boy in her life that had triggered something in her hormones. She had spent a blissful two months with William and Susan. She was barely ever at home. On cooler days they would ensconce themselves in William's bedroom, and he would play his latest guitar compositions to them. When the sun shone, they would roam around, hanging about the small children's playground at the end of Basing Street, or else they'd wander down Portabello Road dreaming of the day they could afford to buy everything in the shops.

One week they helped out on a fruit and veg stall, when the owner broke his wrist and was waiting for his son to come back from Spain. He paid each child a quid for their work and while William spent his money on Grateful Dead and Pink Floyd records, and Susan spent all hers on a maxi dress she'd seen in Chelsea Girl in Oxford Street. Patsy spent her money on make up and a special oil Errol recommended for mixed race hair. It cost ten shillings, but when she smoothed it onto her hair, suddenly all the frizziness disappeared and luscious curls fell about her pretty face. Shirley, one of the girls who worked for Molly, noticed Patsy's transformation and kindly gave her a suitcase full of clothes she'd shoplifted. She couldn't explain why she stole things - Molly paid her well; it was just like a compulsion, something that made her feel better. Patsy didn't care - she was suddenly presented with grown up mini dresses, knee-high boots, and a maxi dress like the one Susan was going to buy. In a school that didn't have a uniform, she was going to return looking like a fashion model.

William didn't have to go to sixth form college until the end of the month, and it pained Patsy to know she would be stuck in a boring classroom while he was at home doing all the things they'd done together. Patsy didn't tell anyone about her feelings for William. Her only confidant was the diary she'd kept since she was eleven. She told William all about her diary and hoped he'd never ask to read it. She'd be so embarrassed if he discovered how she felt.

Even though they were good friends, Patsy knew William could never consider going out with her. She was too young for a start, and besides, however liberal and lovely his parents were, they wouldn't want their son in a relationship with a girl who lived in a house of disrepute. Once she'd gone to the kitchen to get a drink and as she passed the living room, she'd overheard his parents talking about her. In hushed tones Rachel asked her husband if he thought Molly got Patsy to work in the brothel and he said he didn't know, but if he found out she did, he'd report her to social services, so Patsy could be taken away from her.

Patsy had cried herself to sleep that night, going over what her friend's parents had said. What they didn't know was that she'd been taken away from Molly once before. When she was seven the brothel had been raided and Molly was put into prison for four months. During this time

Patsy was fostered by a couple in Bromley. They lived in a big house – he was a doctor and she was a secretary, and they enjoyed a lavish lifestyle. But she wasn't quite sure why they fostered children, they certainly had no time for them. They were rarely home and usually left her with the Mrs Watkins, the nanny - a stern woman who called Patsy a little witch and left her locked in her room. She would sit at the window gazing out at the Kent countryside, and it was there the seeds of Jessica Cole were planted. She dreamt of being a rich, pretty, blonde girl with ponies and lots of friends. For a while Jessica became her imaginary friend; then when she was old enough, she started putting her fantasy life onto paper.

So no matter how big her crush on William was; Patsy knew she couldn't tell him how she felt. If his parents found out, they would do all they could to split them up and the most obvious option would be to tell the police about Molly. Then Patsy would be taken away and maybe end up somewhere even worse than she'd been before.

She left the house wearing one of the dresses Shirley had given her. It was orange and brown paisley with a pussy bow tie. It fell to her mid thigh and with it she wore a pair of white knee length boots. She'd oiled her hair so it hung down over her shoulders and she'd even put on a bit of pink lipstick. Inside she may have still felt like scruffy little Patsy Keegan who lived in the brothel, but on the outside she looked a million dollars.

Susan was wearing her maxi dress and all it did was swamp her little skinny body. She wore a cardigan over the top to hide her arm and she looked a complete mess. Her eyes widened on seeing Patsy.

'Bloody 'ell Pat, you look like a pop star or something.'

'You don't think it's too short?' Patsy asked, looking down at her bare, brown legs.

'Blimey if I 'ad legs like yours I'd want to show 'em off.'

All the kids at North Kensington Secondary Modern thought they were very lucky not to have to wear a uniform. Most of them were too poor to afford to wear anything fancy, and those who really wanted to could still wear the maroon blazer and grey trousers that had been the uniform up until 1969, when Adrian Michaels, the radical new headmaster had taken over. But most chose not to – wearing their own clothes made them feel more grown up. As Patsy and Susan walked into the huge, modern glass building, they passed a group of boys standing by the bike shed, smoking. One of them was Jimmy Lee, who - before William - had been the only boy Patsy had had a crush on. He was always getting into trouble for fighting and answering the teachers back; but he was gorgeous - tall, with dark floppy hair and the bluest eyes she'd ever seen. Even now, despite having William in her life, seeing Jimmy made her heart skip a beat.

As she passed, she realised all the boys' eyes were on her and she heard Jimmy whisper to his mate.

'Is that Patsy Keegan?'

'Looks like it,' replied the mate, awe in his voice. 'Fuck me, what's happened to her?'

Patsy blushed and scurried into school, followed by Susan who hadn't heard any of it. To be noticed by Jimmy Lee was the biggest compliment a girl could get at North Ken. Not only was he the best looking boy in the school, he was also a year older than her and would be leaving next year and starting work - which almost made him a man. Patsy had never felt so good about herself.

They reached the classroom and all heads turned to see Patsy. Karen Hayes, the class bully sniggered but Patsy ignored her. Karen was a pig-faced bitch who was never going to win any beauty contests and was only jealous of Patsy's looks. As normal at the beginning of term, the children chattered amongst themselves, full of stories about their adventures over the summer. And just like before, no one spoke to Patsy or Susan. But for the first time it didn't worry Patsy. Why would she want the approval of someone like Karen Hayes, who lived in a shitty council flat in Shepherds Bush, when she was best friends with someone like William Morton - a handsome, clever, rich boy who lived in a house owned by his parents?

Mr Satchell, their tutor, tried hard to get the kids to be quiet so he could take the register, but in the end he gave up and told them to go to their next class. As they stood to leave, Patsy clearly heard Karen Hayes say to Michelle Dixon, her cohort '*We all know how Patsy paid for that dress don't we?*'

A bunch of children who'd been listening, giggled and Patsy felt that sense of shame once more. Nothing had changed and she longed for the next two years to rush by, so she could leave school once and for all.

The first class of the day was English - Patsy's favourite lesson, and thankfully, because Karen and Michelle were taking Commercial Studies instead, she was spared their scorn. The teacher, Mr Charlton, told them they were now preparing for the exams they would be taking in two years time, and would be expected to do more work. He set them an assignment to complete by the end of the first term. When he told them they had to write a 40,000 word novel, all the kids in the class groaned, except Patsy who relished the prospect. She would just write a longer Jessica Cole story. It would be the easiest thing she'd ever done.

Soon it was playtime and the kids headed for the playground. Patsy was far away, already thinking of plots for her new book. Susan was yabbering on about some group she'd seen on *Top of the Pops* the previous Thursday, and both girls were far too preoccupied to notice they'd walked into Karen and Michelle, and a few of their little followers. The girls all stood in a semi circle, hands on their fat hips, chewing gum. Patsy froze, terrified of what they were going to do.

'Where'd you get that dress?' Karen snarled.

'None of your business,' Patsy replied, trying to sound defiant.

'Don't talk to me like that you little slag.'

Karen walked towards her and even though Patsy was shaking, she stood her ground, aware that Susan had slunk back. Suddenly Karen grabbed hold of one of Patsy's newly teased curls and yanked her head down. She cried out in pain, trying desperately to wriggle free.

‘Have you started selling your little nigger fanny to buy clothes?’ Karen snarled. ‘You disgusting bitch.’

Her grip became momentarily firmer, then suddenly it was released, accompanied by a shout of.

‘Let go of her you fat cow.’

Patsy recognised the voice. It was Jimmy Lee. She stood up and found him striding over to her tormentor, poised for a fight.

‘What’s she to you?’ Karen teased. ‘Give you free ones does she?’

In a blink of an eye, Jimmy raised his hand and hit Karen across the face. With a cry she staggered back into her group of fellow tormentors, who all cooed and shot venomous looks at Jimmy. Before the teacher who was supervising playtime could notice, Jimmy put his arm around Patsy’s shoulder and ushered her away, followed, as always, by Susan.

‘Thank you,’ Patsy uttered. ‘I thought she was going to beat me up.’

‘Fat bitch had it coming to her,’ he snarled. ‘You alright?’

Patsy dared look up into those hooded blue eyes and had to look away again, blushing.

‘Yes I’m fine,’ she answered. ‘Hopefully she won’t pick on me again.’

Suddenly there was a shout of.

‘Lee!’

Jimmy stopped in his tracks and turned around to find Mr Harris, the deputy head, standing by Karen, who was still clutching her cheek.

‘Yes sir?’

‘Do you know what happened to Karen?’

‘No Sir. I think she fell.’

Harris looked at Karen.

‘Is that right Karen? Did you fall?’

She paused for a moment, but when she saw that look of sheer evil in Jimmy’s eyes, she retreated.

‘Yes sir,’ she replied.

‘Very well. On your way Lee.’

Jimmy turned and walked off, his arm still around Patsy’s shoulder.

‘You look lovely,’ he said. ‘I didn’t recognise you when you came in this morning.’

‘T-Thanks,’ she uttered, not quite sure how to handle a compliment.

‘What you done to your hair?’

‘It’s an oil I found. It stops it being frizzy.’

Jimmy laughed and buried his nose in the top of her head.

‘Umm, it smells lovely too.’

Patsy laughed and jolted when a football suddenly struck her legs. For a moment she thought this had all been some kind of trick. She’d had worse things thrown at her before. But suddenly Darren Keyes, Jimmy’s best friend called out.

‘You playin’ Jim?’

‘I’m being summoned,’ he laughed, manoeuvring the ball away from Patsy’s legs. ‘I’ll see you later Patsy.’

He ran off with the ball and Patsy remained rooted to the spot, watching him go. She wondered if she’d dreamt all that. Jimmy Lee had actually been chatting her up. It couldn’t be possible.

‘He fancies you,’ Susan said, but there was no mirth in her face. No pleasure at her friend’s good fortune.

‘Don’t be silly,’ Patsy blushed. ‘Come on, let’s get to Science before Karen and that lot do. She’ll probably want to kill me now.’

Karen didn’t utter another word all day. Everyone knew Jimmy Lee came from one of the hardest families in the area and wasn’t to be messed with, and Karen and her cronies weren’t willing to risk upsetting him just so they could fun tease Patsy Keegan. There were plenty of other targets in a school filled with poor, badly-dressed children.

Patsy floated home on cloud nine. Just by making more of an effort with her appearance she’d won the respect of the best looking – and hardest – boy in the school; finally shaking off the bullies who’d tormented her since she was eleven. Susan had to look after Wayne while her mother popped out, so she went straight home; but Patsy had no intention of hanging around her own house. Her plan was to pop in, say hello to her mother (if she wasn’t already occupied) and go straight back to William’s house. She decided not to tell him about Jimmy. She didn’t want him to think she could possibly be interested in another boy - even though she knew she didn’t stand a chance with him anyway.

She reached her house, and the door opened before she could get the key in. Mr Rigby stepped out, adjusting his hat. He was a nice old man who only ever came to see Judith - the oldest of the girls who worked for Molly. One day he’d come there and Judith was already with a gentleman, so Patsy had made him a cup of tea and sat in the lounge room with him. He’d told her all about his adventures in the Second World War. He’d married a Dutch girl called Hannelore, who he’d met whilst fighting in France and brought her back to England. She’d died of pneumonia in 1968 and he was lonely and liked Judith because she looked a lot like his wife.

‘Hello Patsy dear,’ he smiled. ‘How are you?’

‘Fine thank you Mr Rigby. First day back at school today.’

‘Ne’m mind. Only a couple more years and you’ll be able to leave.’

‘I can’t wait.’

‘Oops,’ he said suddenly, and Patsy wondered if he was in pain. ‘What’s this?’

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a shiny new 50p coin. Patsy gasped when he passed it to her.

‘Have this and buy yourself something nice.’

‘Mr Rigby I couldn’t...’

‘Don’t be silly. Take it with my blessing.’

Patsy smiled and kissed the elderly man on the cheek.

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘I’ll buy a new lipstick.’

‘Lovely. Take care my dear.’

He walked off down the path and Patsy went into the house, clutching her coin. There was the sound of music thudding upstairs and she guessed it was probably Mary. She liked to dance for clients, and as Patsy listened carefully, she could hear that today’s track was *Lola*. It made her smile, thinking of the first day she met William.

‘Patsy is that you?’ Molly called from the lounge room.

‘Yes Mum. I’m just going to William’s.’

‘Can you come in here first?’

Patsy pushed aside the beaded curtain and stepped into the lounge. It was particularly smoky today and she could barely see her mother sitting on the other side of the room. All she could make out was her red blouse with the ruffles down the front.

‘Patsy, this is Roger,’ Molly said. ‘He’s going to be looking after us from now on.’

Suddenly realising there was someone else in the room, Patsy saw a man sitting on the other sofa. He was quite old, in his forties she guessed, although it was hard to tell - anyone over thirty looked old to Patsy. He was very respectable-looking, with slicked down hair; a pin stripe suit, pink tie and a red spotted hankie tucked into his top pocket. His jowly face turned to Patsy and she was a little disconcerted by the look that flickered in his eyes. It was similar to the one Jimmy had shown earlier on. But it hadn’t been creepy when it had been him.

‘Hello Patsy,’ he smiled, his accent not as posh as his look. ‘You didn’t tell me you had such a pretty daughter Molly. How old is she?’

‘Fourteen.’ Molly replied. There was a nervousness in her voice that worried Patsy. Who was this man and what did he want?

‘Where’s her dad? Where was he from?’

‘Trinidad. The angels took my Augustus in 1958 when Patsy was two. He was killed by some Teddy boys.’

‘Awful shame,’ he tutted, though there was no sincerity in his voice. He patted the sofa.

‘Come and sit with me Patsy,’ he said. ‘Come on, don’t be scared.’

Patsy hesitated, not sure what to do, until Molly snapped at her.

‘Go on child, do as the man says!’

Patsy perched on the sofa next to Roger, and when he reached out and patted her knee, out the corner of her eye, she saw her mother flinch.

‘Like school do you Patsy?’ he asked.

‘Yes, thank you,’ she replied. She had no intention of going into the ins and outs of her dislike for North Ken School.

‘And what do you want to be when you leave?’

‘I don’t know yet. I haven’t thought about it.’

‘Patsy does writing,’ Molly said proudly. ‘Don’t you darlin’?’

‘Yes.’

‘You know you’d be a very pretty decoration at one of my parties Patsy,’ Roger said, his rather bulbous eyes surveying her like she was a piece of prize meat.

‘Patsy doesn’t work here,’ Molly said rather quickly.

‘She wouldn’t have to do anything. Just be there being nice. You know, I’ve a few young colleagues who’d love to be waited on by a girl like you Patsy. Would you like that?’

‘I-I don’t know.’

‘I’d pay you for it. How does a pound a time sound to you?’

‘A pound!’ she gasped, thinking of all the things she could do with that.

‘Yes,’ he smiled. ‘Think about it.’

He banged his hands upon his own knees and sighed.

‘I must be going,’ he declared. ‘I’ll see you next Friday Molly.’

‘Yes Roger,’ she replied. ‘Thank you. I’ll see you out.’

Both adults left the room, but Patsy remained where she was, rooted to the spot. A wave of terror had swept over her, and she was now worried that Molly was going to expect her to start working for her. Much as she liked nice old gentlemen like Mr Rigby, the thought of him touching her turned her stomach. How could Molly ask her to do such a thing? She'd always gone out of her way to protect her.

Molly returned and sat next to Patsy, taking her hands in hers.

'You've got to be nice to Roger,' she said softly. 'He's a policeman.'

'A policeman!'

'Yes. We've come to an agreement that I give him some of the takings and let him hold parties here occasionally, and he'll make sure we're not closed down. You don't want me going to prison again do you?'

'No,' Patsy replied, thinking of that lonely room in Bromley.

'Well then. I'll make sure no one touches you. All you need do is make yourself pretty and just talk to the men and get them drinks. You could do that couldn't you?'

'Yes.'

'I'll even give you a couple of quid to get yourself a nice frock. Would you like that?'

'Yes Mum. Can I go to William's now?'

'Course you can. Off you go.'

Patsy ran out of the house, barely able to contain her tears. Without even seeing them, she felt as though all those future clients' hands had crawled over her body. How could Molly possibly hope to protect her? Her mother liked to get drunk, and once she was pissed and flirting with some handsome young copper, she wouldn't be able to pay any attention to her little girl getting mauled by some brute. All Patsy could do was hope Molly would get Maxy or Clint, one of the heavy guys she knew, to keep an eye on things.

By the time she reached William's house and he opened the door to her, the tears were flowing down her face.

'Hey what's wrong?' he asked softly.

Patsy raised her head to tell him but she couldn't. He was so perfect. The only bit of light in her life. He couldn't know.

'It was this girl at school, Karen Hayes, she pulled my hair in the playground.'

'Oh what a horrible girl,' he sighed. 'Don't cry. Come on, come in. I finally got round to buying that Cat Stevens album.'

CHAPTER FIVE

Phillipa Hardcastle was good at her job. Within a day she had checked the census records for 1971 and indeed it confirmed there was a Molly Keegan living at number five, Talbot Road W2. It also recorded a child living with her - a daughter called Patricia Ann, aged fifteen. Phillipa suggested they took a trip over to Notting Hill, just on the off chance someone still lived there who remembered Molly. London was like that; even the most gentrified areas had houses that had been occupied by the same old lady for about fifty years, who would repeatedly refuse her landlord's financial offers to move. The two women made arrangements to meet the next day, and Sasha looked forward to seeing Phillipa again, she was the sort of person she would have liked as a friend.

Luca was out, as usual. Apparently there was some testimonial match at the Emirates Stadium. He wasn't playing, but he'd been invited, and Sasha didn't even bother asking him if he'd be back that night; he never gave a straight answer, so she didn't see the point in wasting her breath.

She sat watching TV with Kylie. Neither of them were actually watching the TV. Kylie was listening to her iPod and sending countless text messages to her friends, and Sasha's mind was on her mother. She wondered if by finding Patty's diaries, she would be any closer to discovering who her father was. She didn't even know his name; what he looked like or anything. She guessed he was tall, as Patty was only 5'2 and yet Sasha was 5'7. She was aware he was probably violent, but it would have been nice to know if he was dead or alive.

She also wondered if she should tell Kylie about what she was doing. As much as Patty liked anyone, she liked Kylie. Whenever there was a family do, she would talk to her, and when Kylie had had to do work experience for school, Patty had arranged for her to go to Nova Publishing for two weeks. Sasha could only surmise it was because Kylie was the nearest thing Patty had to a grandchild, and a lot of bad parents made up for their shortcomings through their grandchildren.

The front door bell rang, and with Kylie locked in her own little world, Sasha knew it would be up to her to go and answer it. Quite often kids would come knocking, asking for Luca's autograph. Sasha would give them one from the stack he kept in his office, and they'd go away happy. She was rather shocked when she opened the door and found a petite blonde wearing a very short skirt standing there.

'Is Luca in?' she asked in a very broad Scouse accent.

'No. What do you need him for?'

'I need to talk to him.'

'Well I'm his wife, you can talk to me.'

The girl's big, overly made up eyes scanned Sasha and she nodded slowly.

'Yeah you're exactly how he described you. I take it 'e ain't told you about me?'

'I'm sorry I'm completely confused. Who are you?'

‘I’m Melanie.’ She ran her hand over her incredibly flat stomach. ‘And this is his kid.’

Sasha physically reeled backwards. It wasn’t exactly a shock. She as good as guessed her husband played away in more ways than one. But to actually be presented with one of his floozies, claiming to be pregnant, on her own doorstep, was more than she could handle.

‘You’ll have to come back,’ she said, going to shut the door.

Melanie blocked it with her foot.

‘I’ve just come down from Bootle. I’m knackered.’

Sasha glanced outside. Sometimes, when they had nothing better to do, the paparazzi would hang around the gate, just in case something exciting happened. Their interest had started to peak again now, with Patty missing; and Sasha was worried they were watching. She ushered Melanie in, but drew the line at picking her suitcase up for her.

‘Come in,’ she said.

Shaking, she managed to walk as far as the kitchen, and told Melanie to sit on the sofa. She couldn’t bring herself to offer the girl coffee and just stood opposite her, staring at her, thinking how she was everything she wasn’t – little, curvaceous, blonde and pretty.

‘Can you please tell me how you met my husband?’ she asked, trying to keep her voice firm.

‘Sutton Town were playing Everton in December. I was waitressing at a Christmas party at the Radisson and some of the players turned up. I slept with Luca that night. Then slept with him again when they played Liverpool last month.’

Sasha couldn’t help but laugh.

‘So that gives you some sort of right to come here and demand him be a father to your child does it? You haven’t even had a relationship. You’ve had sex, twice.’

‘Yeah, and he’s texted and rang me every day in between. How do you think I knew where you lived? I can show you the messages if you like.’

‘Okay, assuming Luca is the father of your child. Assuming you’re even pregnant. What do you want him to do about it?’

‘I want him to do what he said he’d do and leave you.’

‘He said he’d leave me?’

‘Yeah.’

Sasha didn’t believe her for a moment. If Luca was going to leave her, it would be for someone far classier than this little tramp. She fetched her wallet from the side of the microwave and rifled through it. There were two fifty pound notes in there. She pulled them out and offered them to Melanie.

‘There, take that. Go and find a hotel and get out of my house.’

The girl snatched the money and stuffed it in the pocket of her cropped biker’s jacket.

‘Alright. Well I’ll be back tomorrow to see Luca. I mean that.’

She stood up, pulled up the handle of her suitcase and without a word of thanks to Sasha, wheeled it out of the kitchen. In a rare act, Sasha grabbed the whiskey bottle that was standing on the kitchen table and drank straight from it. She needed something to steady her nerves. What worried her most of all was that she wasn’t upset. She didn’t even feel hurt. Her biggest annoyance had been this girl trespassing in her house, making demands. She and Luca had been barely more than housemates of late and she’d somehow made herself go cold on him. She worried about Kylie though, wondering who she would stay with if they split up. It saddened her to think she might remain with her father. Sasha had grown to love her stepdaughter like she was her own.

Luca didn’t come home that night, and Sasha lay awake wondering if Melanie had contacted him and they’d spent the night at her hotel. Sasha had always known something like this would happen. That Luca would find someone more suitable. When they met at the millennium party her mother threw, Sasha had been astounded and flattered that Chelsea’s gorgeous star striker found her attractive. He’d even dumped his current girlfriend - a model called Cassie, for her and Sasha had fallen madly in love with him. But as time went on she became more and more convinced he’d only gone after her because he was bored and looking for a diversion. Being good-looking and fashion conscious, he’d been compared to David Beckham a lot, so he thought he’d garner attention by marrying Patty Belleville’s daughter - and had regretted it ever since.

Anna, his mother had even tried taking Sasha under her wing, moulding her into some sort of Posh Spice clone. But Sasha wasn’t having any of it. She was a respected illustrator and certainly didn’t want to be paraded all over *OK!* magazine every week. But it was different for Luca. He knew his career was coming to an end and needed someone by his side who would maintain publicity. And Melanie was certainly more photogenic than Sasha.

And what if she was pregnant? She would give Luca something Sasha never could. That was her only regret. She would have loved a child of her own. When she was growing up, pushed aside for Rorie and neglected by Patty, she would dream of the day when she could have her own daughter, and promised herself she would be the best mum in the world. Instead she was barren and never provided Luca with the son she knew deep down he longed for. If Melanie gave him a boy, Sasha knew he would be over the moon, and would probably demand a divorce so his son could carry his name legally.

The following morning, tired from her fretful night, Sasha showered and dressed, and left the house, vowing to concentrate on finding Patty and not dwell on her husband’s infidelity. In some ways it was all connected. If she hadn’t had such low self-esteem she would have left Luca years ago; and if she’d had a better mother, she wouldn’t have had such low self-esteem to start off with. If she could find out why Patty had treated her in the way she had, maybe then she could work on her own feelings, and find the courage to get out of her dead-end marriage.

She took a brisk walk to Epsom Station, then took the train to Clapham Junction, where she changed to another one that would take her to Kensington Olympia. Phillipa was waiting outside

in a bright red VW Polo. This jaunty looking car was very suited to Phillipa's personality. Today she had tried to tie that woolly hair into a pony tail, but it was escaping and tendrils fell either side of her face, making her look ever so slightly mad.

'I've searched the electoral registers for a Susan Clapp but I can't find anyone,' she explained as she drove off. 'But of course that doesn't mean a thing because she may have married or just not registered.'

'What about Molly Keegan? Have you looked for my grandmother?'

'Would you like me to?'

'Yes please. I've no idea how old she is. Mum's fifty-three so I'm guessing she'd be in her seventies or eighties if she's still alive.'

'Are you okay Sasha?' Phillipa frowned. 'You seem a bit down.'

'I'm okay,' she sighed, feeling the need to tell someone. 'Well I'm not. Last night a girl turned up on my doorstep, claiming to be pregnant by my husband.'

'You're kidding?'

'I'm not. I gave her some money and told her to go away, but she reckons she's coming back today to see Luca.'

'That's terrible. Do you think it's true?'

'I'm not sure about the pregnancy bit, but I believe she slept with him. Luca's always staying out late, or not coming home at all. He has bimbos throwing themselves at him all the time - girls half my age practically. What do you expect?'

'You almost sound as though you're saying it's acceptable.'

'It's not acceptable, but with Mum disappearing, it's made me take a look at my whole life. I never had a proper relationship with Patty. I was born in a woman's refuge and most of the women there took turns in looking after me apparently. Then once Mum had some money she made sure there was a nanny on tap to look after me. When Rorie was born, she was Mummy's little princess. Mum seemed overwhelmed that she had a blonde haired, blue-eyed child, and of course I got pushed aside. When the novelty wore off Rorie, she started going out with Dana's father and had her. Unfortunately for Dana she came out a short, fat dumpling and was another disappointment for Mum. By the time Rorie started answering her back, she didn't have time for any of us.'

'I'm not making excuses for her, but I guess if her own mother wasn't much cop - running a brothel and everything, she didn't know how to be a good mother.'

'Maybe. I think she would have been happier if Dana had been a boy. I can remember her buying loads of boy's things when she was pregnant. I think I was probably an accident; Rorie was her trying to hold onto Jonathan, and Dana was her attempt at getting a son. Mother doesn't like to fail, and we're probably her three biggest failures.'

‘It’s very sad. But it’s not too late. If we can find her, maybe the pair of you can put things back on track. Especially if she knows how far you’ve gone to get her.’

Sasha looked out the window at West London rushing by.

‘Knowing my mother, she’ll just moan at me for poking my nose in.’

Arriving in Talbot Road, it was hard to believe this street had ever housed poor families. The grand Nash houses were flawless; the roads filled with top of the range cars, and every house had an expensive looking burglar alarm fitted outside. Sasha tried to imagine it forty years ago. The houses run down and filled with immigrants and the very poor. Her mother a raggedy little kid running between the brothel and William’s house.

Phillipa managed to find a parking space outside number five and it made shivers run down Sasha’s spine to see the house where her mother grew up. It was now obviously occupied by someone very rich. Expensive shutters were up the window, the brass knocker on the door gleamed in the sunlight. She wondered if the occupants knew they were living in a former brothel.

‘This place must be worth millions,’ Phillipa uttered, sliding her sunglasses down over her eyes. ‘I doubt it was like this when your mother lived here.’

Sasha looked around at the other houses down this long road. They were all the same - worth lots of money but somehow anonymous. She doubted if the neighbours even spoke to one another. Some of them probably barely even lived there, and used it as a stop gap when they visited London. It was quite sad really.

‘Let’s have a walk,’ Phillipa suggested. ‘There might be the odd house down here that hasn’t been renovated.’

They walked the length of Talbot Road, searching for that one scruffy house, that one old lady who refused to be paid off by her landlord and take a flat in sheltered housing. But there was nothing. It seemed a whole generation of people had disappeared to make way for the march of time. All the people who had got rich in the last twenty-five years had stripped communities of their identity, making their house a fortress. No one down here was going to remember Patty, Molly or Susan.

‘There’s a main road off the end of here,’ Phillipa said. ‘You never know, there might be one shop that’s remained since back then.’

‘I seriously doubt it. Poor sods probably couldn’t afford to pay the rates.’

They walked together onto Chepstow Road - a long A-road stretching across West London. It was filled with the usual estate agents, restaurants and boutiques. Sasha couldn’t see where they were going to find someone who could help them. London was a different city to the one her mother had grown up in.

‘Ooh a launderette,’ Phillipa said, spying something in the distance, narrowing her eyes and pursing her lips. ‘Come on.’

They crossed the road and headed for a grotty looking launderette on the corner of a side street.

‘Most launderettes have been there for years,’ Phillipa explained as they walked. ‘In the age of the washing machine, no one in their right mind is going to open a launderette. More often than not, the clientele are old ladies who don’t have a machine at home.’

Sasha was impressed with Phillipa’s powers of deduction.

‘Very good,’ she smiled. ‘I’d never have thought of that.’

‘See, all that time at Hendon wasn’t wasted.’

As Phillipa pushed the door to the launderette open, Sasha felt the heat hit her in the face, like when you step off the plane in a hot country. It surprised her that even in this day and age, every machine in this place was going. She couldn’t believe that when a washing machine could be bought for under £200, people would still rather spend money in places like this. Elderly women were sitting on the benches that ran along the centre, surrounded by brightly coloured bags, reading their newspapers and drinking tea out of Styrofoam cups. They looked up at the two pretty young women who had walked in.

‘All the machines are busy love,’ the woman at the counter called out. She looked at least seventy and her hair was frizzy from the damp heat of the launderette. Sasha felt a frisson of excitement, wondering if this woman had ever known her mother.

‘That’s okay,’ Phillipa said, walking over to the counter. ‘We’ve actually come to see you. Do you remember a lady who used to live around here called Mrs Clapp?’

‘No, sorry love,’ the lady said. ‘I’m just looking after this place for my sister.’

‘I see. So the name Molly Keegan doesn’t mean anything to you?’

‘No. Are you the police?’

‘No,’ Phillipa laughed. ‘No, my friend here’s mum used to live on Talbot Road and she wants to find the people who knew her when she was a little girl.’

‘Sorry I can’t help you love.’

‘No worries.’

Phillipa turned to leave, but was stopped by a rather decrepit old woman sitting on the bench, who reached out and touched her leg.

‘I remember Molly Keegan love,’ she said.

‘Really?’ Phillipa asked, sitting beside her. ‘What do you remember?’

‘I used to live at fifty nine Talbot Road,’ the old woman said, disapproval still evident in her now opaque, watery eyes. ‘Everyone down that road knew Molly Keegan.’

‘Would you like to go for a cup of tea?’ Phillipa asked. ‘Then we can talk somewhere more quiet.’

‘If you want love,’ the old woman shrugged.

She introduced herself as Mrs Evans, and as they left, she asked the woman behind the counter to look out for her washing. They went to a little greasy spoon café a few doors down and found a table close to the window. Phillipa went up to the counter while Sasha sat opposite Mrs Evans, wondering what to say.

‘So who was your mum then?’ the old woman asked.

‘Er, Patsy Keegan,’ Sasha said, remembering to use her mother’s real name.

‘Little Patsy Keegan?!’ Mrs Evans exclaimed. ‘You’re kidding.’

‘No, I’m not. I’m her eldest daughter.’

‘What happened to her?’

‘She er...moved.’

Sasha was spared any more questioning by Phillipa rejoining them, carrying a tray with three cups of tea on. She laid them on the table and sat down, giving Mrs Evans her most sparkly smile.

‘Thanks for talking to us Mrs Evans.’

‘Oh you’re welcome love. This young lady was telling me she was Patsy Keegan’s daughter. I can’t believe it. When I last saw her she was only a little girl herself.’

‘When was that?’ Phillipa asked.

‘Ooh must have been 1971, 72, something like that. She left and shortly after that old Molly got closed down once and for all.’

‘My grandmother ran a brothel didn’t she?’ Sasha asked quietly.

‘Disgraceful it was,’ Mrs Evans winced. ‘All the comings and goings. We all wanted them out. No disrespect to your mum, she was a lovely little kid. We all felt sorry for her, living in that place. She was a beautiful little thing, like a lot of those coloured kiddies are. What’s she doing these days?’

‘That’s the thing,’ Phillipa interjected. ‘Sasha hasn’t seen her mother for years and she’s trying to find her.’

Sasha thanked God Mrs Evans obviously hadn’t been watching the Natasha Murray Show the other day, because she would have put two and two together.

‘I can’t help love,’ Mrs Evans said. ‘I moved out of Talbot Road in 1977. They put me in a nice little flat in Hereford Road.’

‘My mother used to speak of a girl called Susan Clapp. Do you remember her?’

‘Susan Clapp? With the one arm? Oh yeah I remember her. Her mother got put away for dealing in stolen goods. The kids were taken into care. Not Susan though. She was big enough to look after herself.’

‘Where did she go?’

‘No idea love. But her old lady moved into a flat in Harrow Road - Greening House. She’s still there as far as I know.’

‘Fantastic!’ Phillipa gasped. ‘I don’t suppose you know what number?’

‘Sorry love, no. I sometimes see her at the community centre. They do bingo of a Thursday for the senior citizens. Edna doesn’t always go. She can still be a funny cow.’

‘Why was she funny?’

‘Well, she’d talk to you one day, walk past you the next. Oh and she did put on that little kid. Susan was always looking after their Wayne, the youngest. Sometimes she’d go out with Patsy and that young posh fella who moved in, but that was about it. Poor little cow.’

‘What about my grandmother?’ Sasha asked. ‘Do you know where she is?’

‘No idea. Molly got three years for living off im...im. Running a brothel. By the time she came back, the landlord ‘ad sold the ‘ouse to some rich Arab.’

‘What was she like? I never met her.’

‘Molly? Well I remember when she first came to Talbot Road. She ‘ad a room in number forty-two. She was on the plump side, but pretty, with curly red hair. She was a waitress at the Lyons Corner House. I dunno what it was with them Irish girls but they always ‘ung around with the West Indians. It was a proper scandal when Augustus Riley moved in with her. ‘andsome fella ‘e was. He worked on the buses but he also did drawings. He could sketch anything you asked him to. He did a little drawing of my niece for her birthday once.’

Sasha felt a surge of warmth towards this unknown man. She had obviously inherited her grandfather’s artistic abilities. Patty might have been good with words but she couldn’t draw for toffee!

‘He was killed wasn’t he?’ she asked.

‘Yeah, when Patsy was two. You see he couldn’t marry Molly because it turned out he had a wife back in the West Indies, so they lived together. They got some proper abuse for it. Dog turds through the door, spat at in the street. But Molly was so in love with ‘im, she just held her head high and ignored it. She was over the moon when little Patricia arrived. Oh she was a beautiful baby. Looked just like her dad. Then poor old Augustus got done over in the riots in 1958. These teddy boys pulled him off a bus and he fell and banged his head and died. Molly was inconsolable. Even the old Biddies down the street who didn’t approve of ‘er and ‘im felt so sorry for the little baby. Molly just used to sit on her front steps drinking brandy. I’d go in and

find the little baby soaked through. Molly started selling herself to get money for drink. If you ask me, old Mr Lowski, the landlord was one of her clients, cos just a couple of years later she had that 'ouse at number five to 'erself. She was off the drink by then but she'd got used to the money and that's when she started running the brothel.'

'She must have got raided from time to time?' Phillipa asked, sipping her tea.

'Oh she did. First time it happened, she decided to go straight. Kicked all the girls out and it was just her and Patsy. She got a job in a pub in Kilburn but the money weren't anything like what she earned on the game. So she went back to it. Next time she was raided she went away for a few months. Patsy got taken into care. I think she was fostered out but I'm not sure. Then she came back and the next time Molly was raided, it was the big one and she was shut down for good.'

'Do you think my mother worked for her?'

'Patsy? Oh I wouldn't think so love. Your grandmother worshipped the ground she walked on. Not many girls back then would have kept a little black baby, especially when the dad died. But she 'ung onto Patsy.'

Phillipa looked at her watch and then finished her tea.

'Well I've got to be going,' she said. 'Thank you so much for your help Mrs Evans.'

'You're welcome love.' She looked at Sasha. 'I 'ope you find your mum.'

'Thank you.'

'You know, something funny 'appened a few years ago. I was round me granddaughter's house and she was watching that Richard and Judy, and they were talking to this writer woman about her novel and I remember thinking '*That don't 'alf look like Patsy Keegan*'. You know, like how I imagined she'd be if she was a grown woman.'

'Obviously a coincidence,' Sasha smiled nervously. 'Well thank you once again.'

The three women left the café, and Sasha and Phillipa watched Mrs Evans shuffle back towards the launderette and waited until she was out of earshot before they dared speak.

'Right, I've got to go,' Phillipa said. 'I'm having lunch with an errant husband. But this afternoon I'll find a number for this Edna Clapp and see if she'll let us talk to her.'

'Thanks. I'd really like to find my grandmother too, she sounds a remarkable woman.'

'She does. Well who knows? This Edna might be able to help us. Anyway, we'd better be getting back to the car. I'll drop you at the tube. I've got to go home and tart myself up to look like someone who'd attract a married man!'

Sasha was grateful for the long train journey home. It gave her a chance to sit and mull over what she'd discovered today. Suddenly characters had come to life who'd only ever sat in her imagination. She'd been brought up to believe her grandmother was a rich bitch who'd married an American musician and had disowned Patty. The truth was that Molly was a poor Irish

woman who'd given birth to an illegitimate, black baby at a time when to do such a thing carried a terrible stigma. Yet, through it all, she'd kept Patty and raised her, and even though she'd made mistakes - running a brothel and getting in trouble, it seemed she'd done her best for her daughter. More than Patty had ever done for Sasha, Rorie or Dana.

Somehow Sasha wanted to see her grandmother more than she did her mother. She felt a bond with her. After all that Molly had done to keep Patty and bring her up, she'd repaid her by running away. Maybe Patty was just born selfish. William said she'd been sweet as a young teenager; but he'd been a boy at the same time and probably blinded by his hormones. Men rarely could see through women anyway, no matter what their age.

She couldn't be bothered to walk back to the house and so took a cab from Epsom Station. As the car pulled up, she noticed Luca's Jag on the drive. He was back from training, and as Sasha paid the driver, she braced herself for what might be facing her. Had Melanie come back to cause trouble or had she just been all talk?

As soon as she put the key in the door, Luca called out to her.

'We're in the living room Sash.'

Sasha entered the living room and was rendered speechless when the first thing she saw was Luca and Melanie sitting together on the sofa opposite the door. Luca's arm was around her shoulder and the sheepish expression on his face complimented the one of sheer smugness Melanie wore. On the other sofa Kylie looked nervous, her hands clamped between her knees. Sasha fumbled for the seat and sat beside her step-daughter. Not quite sure what was going on.

'You okay Sasha?' Luca asked. What a stupid question. Of course she wasn't okay.

'What's going on?' she uttered.

'I was going to tell you about Melanie, but I was waiting for the right time. With all this with Patty and everything, it never seemed right. But it's time you knew the truth.'

'He wants a divorce,' Melanie chipped in, that gleeful smile spreading wider.

'W-What?' Sasha cried.

'We've hardly been a couple for ages Sash,' Luca said. 'We're more like housemates. Mel's having my baby and I want to make a go of it.'

'So you're just casting me aside?'

'No of course not. I'll buy you a house wherever you want and put ten million in the bank. How does that sound?'

Sasha was speechless. She had given this man nearly nine years of her life; had helped raise his daughter, and yet she was being cast aside like he did his cars when he grew tired of them. And not only was she being cast aside, she was going to be homeless. This house - with its tasteful décor - was all her doing. If Luca had had his way, it would have been all tacky and

cheap and filled with gadgets. Sasha was the one who'd made it into a proper home, and now Melanie was going to get her chavvy little paws on it.

'You want me to leave?' she uttered.

'I think it's for the best. Of course you can have anything here that's yours. Hey, why don't I buy you a little studio somewhere? You can do your drawing then.'

'I don't need your charity Luca,' she snapped, swallowing back the tears. Though she wasn't crying because she was losing her husband, she was crying because she felt a fool. This little bitch had come in and was going to take over her home and what should be her life. Melanie would be the sort of wife Luca should have always had – glamorous and vacuous. It also hurt because she could see Melanie was taking great pleasure in watching her humiliation.

She couldn't bear to be in the room with them any longer. She would move out straight away. Her mother's house was standing empty while she was missing, and Sasha decided she would move in there while she looked around for a flat. She rushed out of the room and up to her bedroom, flopping down upon the bed and letting the tears flow.

A thousand different emotions were coursing through her. The biggest one was regret. She'd wasted the best years of her life on a feckless man who was clearly always looking for the next main chance. It wasn't as though she had lots of friends she could call upon. The intellectually minded friends she'd made at college soon deserted her when she married a Premiership footballer who showed no interest in them. So from then on, the women she'd mixed with had been other wives and girlfriends - minor showbiz celebrities. No one she would want to keep in touch with.

She called Dana and discovered her sister was at the television studio where they had constructed a beauty salon, where she would train. Dana had been on so many reality TV shows. Her only claim to fame was being Patty's daughter - she didn't actually *do* anything. However she'd made a healthy living from these shows and various magazine sponsorships. Dana's weight battle was legendary and more than one women's weekly had paid her to follow their diet plan. Now Nova were interested in her writing her autobiography; but Sasha guessed that was on hold seeing as there was a whole new chapter to add regarding her mother's disappearance.

'What's up?' Dana asked in her most distracted voice.

'Dan I need to come and stay in Mum's house. Luca's kicked me out.'

'What?!'

'He's moving his new bimbo in and I'm being chucked out. I'm coming to stay at Mum's.'

'Okay, well you'd better ring Mrs Watson and let her know, otherwise she'll start kicking off.'

'Yes, I will. I'll see you later.'

'Yeah okay, I've got to go, I'm needed on set.'

She hung up and Sasha called her mother's housekeeper. Mrs Watson was typically prickly, claiming Ms Belleville hadn't given her permission for Sasha to stay etcetera etcetera. Sasha firmly reminded her that she was Ms Belleville's daughter and she was entitled to stay if she wanted. That soon shut her up and Sasha ended the call. She then went to her walk-in wardrobe to get her suitcase, deciding to only pack essential stuff. Luca could send the rest over. She just wanted to be out of here as quickly as possible.

Flinging the suitcase onto the bed, she felt the strangest sensation in her stomach. She actually had butterflies and a slight feeling of excitement. As hurtful as it was; at the same time it almost felt as though she was being let out of a cage. She'd been trapped in Luca's world for so long, it would be nice to discover herself. What would hurt would be when Melanie scored the inevitable *OK!* front cover and would no doubt harp on and on about how she was going to be a different wife to Sasha. The sort of wife Luca deserved.

There was a knock on the door and when it opened, Sasha turned round to find it was Kylie. She was crying and Sasha had never felt more angry with Luca. He hadn't taken his daughter's feelings into consideration - this was yet another upheaval for her.

'Come here Kyles,' she smiled, opening her arms. Kylie stepped up to her and they embraced. Sasha held on tightly to her step-daughter, realising just how much she was going to miss her.

'I'm going to stay at Patty's house,' she said. 'If your dad or Melanie get too much for you, come and stay with me.'

'Can I really?' she sniffed into Sasha's shoulder. 'Melanie seems horrible.'

'Give her a chance, she might be alright. But you're always welcome at Patty's, don't forget that.'

Kylie started crying again and Sasha hugged her once more, realising how painful it was going to be to leave her. She'd been a little girl of nine when she'd first met her. Now she was a beautiful young woman. Sasha remembered when she'd started her periods and had come to her for advice. Then when she lost her virginity to her first love at sixteen, and had a pregnancy scare after the potential father had gone off travelling, it had been Sasha she'd confided in. Now it broke Sasha's heart to leave her stepdaughter alone at an age when everything was still so puzzling.

'You know I love you don't you?' she said, trying to hold back the tears.

'I love you too.'

'Promise me you'll visit.'

'I promise. It might be sooner than you think.'

With a heavy heart, Sasha drove to London. The more she thought about it, the less sad she was about leaving Luca. It was Kylie she worried about. She remembered being a child, and the many men who had moved into Patty's house. Some were great and she'd bond with them, only for them to be dumped by Patty and ordered to leave. Then there were the others who saw the three little girls as a hindrance and so Patty would send them off to ski camp or some other

ridiculous place, so they could be looked after by anyone other than her. Sasha hated the thought of Melanie being a wicked stepmother to Kylie, and only hoped she'd take her advice and come and see her.

Patty had three homes; her town house in Chelsea, a luxurious cottage in Wiltshire and a penthouse pad in New York. She also loved to stay in Cannes; but whenever she visited there, she would stay at Mykonos Dimitriou's villa. If Sasha hadn't been in the middle of an investigation to find her mother, she would have gone to the Wiltshire house to get away from it all, but she knew she had no choice but to base herself in London.

She parked her car in the private underground car park that ran underneath the terrace of houses, and took the lift up to the lobby of her mother's house. Within moments Mrs Watson appeared, offering to help her with her case.

'Will you be staying long Mrs Fletcher?' Mrs Watson asked. Sasha had no idea why she insisted on calling her by her married name. She'd known her since she was fifteen. Couldn't she just call her Sasha?

'I doubt it,' she replied, walking into her mother's lounge, which was characteristically over the top and had far too many photographs and ornaments for a fairly small room. 'I'll leave as soon as my mother comes back.'

'Would you like me to make you something to eat?'

Sasha hadn't had any lunch, but she couldn't face food. Her insides were too knotted up with anguish and that strange feeling of excitement.

'I'll be fine, thank you.'

'Very well. I'll be down in the basement if you need me.'

The woman retreated, and Sasha flopped down onto the leather sofa. She looked around the room at the photos of Patty with all her celeb friends. On the top shelf in the alcove was Sasha's wedding picture; next to it, a black and white shot of a very young Rorie, taken on one of her first shoots.

There were no childhood photos of Patty and it truly was as though her life had begun in 1978 when she published the first Jezebel Cole book. Like a butterfly, she had emerged from the caterpillar that was little Patsy Keegan and had turned into a monster. Sasha wondered if the diaries were in this house. Maybe locked away in a drawer or hidden under the floorboards. They had to be somewhere, they just had to.

Sasha was awoken from her trance by her phone vibrating in her pocket. She pulled it out and saw it was Phillipa. She hoped and prayed she had good news.

'Hello.'

'Sasha it's me. I've found Edna Clapp. I called her and she's willing to meet us on Saturday.'

'Really?'

‘Yes. That’s great news isn’t it?’

‘It is. She might even know where my grandmother is.’

‘Here’s hoping.’

‘Oh I should let you know, Luca’s chucked me out so I’m staying at my mother’s house in Chelsea.’

‘He’s thrown you out?’

‘Yep. He’s moved the bimbo in.’

‘Oh Sasha I’m so sorry. Let’s hope Edna’s got some good news for us. You could do with something to cheer you up.’

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CHAPTER SIX

November 1970

Patsy sat on her bed, trying to hold her diary against her shaking knees. She had to write it down - she couldn't tell anyone else about what had happened the night before – not even Susan. She knew all about Patsy hostessing at the parties Molly threw for Roger - the police superintendent; but last night it had all gone wrong and Patsy never wanted her to find out.

Up until now it had been quite fun. Patsy got to wear nice dresses and did her hair and make up, and all she had to do was chat to the men, who in all fairness were usually more interested in the older, more experienced girls than a child like Patsy. Whenever she spoke to them, their eyes would be on someone like Judith or Shirley in their micro, lace dresses with nothing underneath, and as soon as they were available, the young girl would be forgotten and they would be off for some fun in one of the bedrooms.

That had all changed last night and Patsy felt desperate to tell someone. Even Molly didn't know about it - she'd gone to the off licence to get more of the whisky Roger liked, when it had all kicked off. Patsy felt too ashamed to tell Susan, and William didn't know anything about her going to the parties, so that meant she had no one to confide in.

Her only other 'friend' was her diary, and she was too ashamed to even write that in her own voice. She decided to write it as Jessica Cole; then she could separate it from the little girl who still played out with Susan, and went to the church hall on Sunday to listen to William rehearsing with his group, Major Tom. Jessica Cole was no longer the pony riding, boarding school pupil. She was the alter ego of Patsy, and she could be the one horrible things happened to.

Tuesday 3rd November 1970

Jessica ran home from school and went straight up to her bedroom. She was frightened that if there were any men in the house they would be the same as the one last night. She had gone to another party and thought it was going to be the same as the others R had organised. But this one had been different. All the other girls were in their underwear, and the men were ones she didn't recognise. They were all very drunk, and when she tried to sit and talk to them, their hands were wandering all over her. Jessica asked her mother if she could leave the party, but as mother went to tell her she could, R stepped in and said the men wanted her there. So mother just told her to be careful.

R ran out of his favourite whiskey and told mother to go and get some more, so she left and Jessica felt really scared. All the other girls seemed to be getting very drunk and suddenly there seemed to be no one looking out for her. One of the men, E, seemed to watch every move she made. He was a horrible fat man and Jessica couldn't even imagine him being a policeman. He was so out of condition, he'd never be able to chase after robbers. She went to chat with another man, C, who was R's best friend and always attended the parties. He had a thing for Shirley and never bothered Jessica.

E still wouldn't take no for an answer and asked Jessica if she would go to a room with him and when she said no, R told her in a rather firm voice to be nice to his guests. Jessica knew she couldn't bring herself to touch this man, but at the same time she didn't want the police to take

her mother away. She got up to leave with him, and Cathy, one of her mother's girls asked her what she was doing. Jessica replied she was okay, but she could tell by the look on Cathy's face that she didn't believe her. She told Jessica to take E into the kitchen, as all the rooms were taken. Jessica was so grateful for this; at least the kitchen was in full view of everyone and he wouldn't be able to do anything to her.

They went out into the kitchen. E lunged at Jessica, trying to kiss her. His breath stank of alcohol and cigarettes and it made her feel sick. He laughed as she tried to duck, and pushed her against the wall, seeming to hold her still without even touching her - she guessed it was fear doing the trick. He told her she was a pretty little thing and that he liked young girls. He asked if she'd done it before and when she said no, he became even more interested. He offered her ten quid if she'd let him be the first, but Jessica still said no. She thought of W and how she wanted him to be her first when the time came. Not some man old enough to be her father. E tried to kiss her again and panicking, Jessica ran away, out the back door and into the yard.

E followed her, pushing her against the wall beside the old outside privy. He pressed one arm against her neck, the other hand trailing down her body. Jessica froze in horror when she felt him lift her skirt and stuff his hands into her knickers. He touched her in places no one had ever touched her before, his probing fingers invading and hurting her. She cried, begging him to stop, but still he persisted. He tried to kiss her but she pulled her head away, screaming. That was when he became angry, pulling her by the hair, yanking her head down like that school bully had that day. He warned Jessica, in a really frightening voice, that he could rape her there and then and no one would believe her. After all, she was the nigger daughter of a whore and he was a Detective Inspector.

Just when Jessica thought she was going to have to surrender to her fate, salvation came in the shape of Cathy, who appeared from nowhere, grabbing this huge man by the shoulders and pulling him away. She yelled at him not to touch Jessica as she was only a kid. To Jessica's surprise, he listened to her and after spitting on Jessica's shoes, walked back into the house. Jessica started to cry and Cathy comforted her, taking her up to her room, and telling her to stay there and to put a chair up against the door so no one could get in. She promised to tell R and mother that Jessica wasn't feeling well and wouldn't be coming back to the party.

Jessica didn't sleep until she'd heard every one of those disgusting men leave the house, terrified that E would come and find her and burst the door down. Jessica hoped he would never attend another party and she'd never have to endure that again.

Patsy closed the book and hid it under her mattress once more. She'd been keeping a diary since she was eleven and it had always been written as herself, but now such horrible things were happening to her, it was easier to let Jessica take the pain. Then when she shut the book, it was as though she was closing that particular chapter, just like any other work of fiction.

Deciding she couldn't stay in the house any longer, she made her escape. She wanted to go to William's, but was stopped when she saw Susan sitting on the steps leading up to her house, head hung low, sniffing.

'What's the matter?' Patsy asked.

Susan raised her head and Patsy gasped when she saw her friend sporting a black eye, her left cheek swollen. She hadn't had that when she came home from school an hour ago.

'Who did that?'

'Uncle Donald,' she sniffed. 'Mum asked me to look after Wayne while she chatted to him, but you know I was late handing in that Science homework and wanted to get it done, so I said no. So Uncle Donald got angry. He punched me and threw me out here.'

Patsy didn't say anything, but underneath she seethed with anger, wishing she could find a way of getting enough money together for them to run away. If they made themselves up, she and Susan could pass themselves off as sixteen. Then they could get jobs and rent a flat together. After being protected by Molly for so long, Patsy was suddenly a target for Roger's creepy friends, and poor Susan was a punch-bag for her mother's many boyfriends. It wasn't fair and they would both be better off far away.

'I've got some money,' she finally said. 'Do you fancy a milkshake in the Wimpy?'

'I can't go in Wimpy looking like this. Everyone'll laugh at me more than they normally do.'

Suddenly there was another voice.

'Oi, you two. Are you coming in?'

Patsy looked up. William was leaning out of his window, and up in the sky, with his golden hair and skin, and that broad smile upon his face; he was like the very sun shining down upon this miserable tableau.

'Just coming,' she called. She looked at Susan.

'You coming too?'

'I s'pose so,' Susan shrugged.

Up in William's bedroom, drinking coke and listening to the new songs he'd written; both Patsy and Susan felt like normal girls once again. Patsy had locked away last night's horrors in the pages of her diary; and seeing Patsy happy made Susan happy. She was as besotted with her friend, as Patsy was with William. Patsy was the only person who'd ever shown her any affection, and sometimes she wished she could tell her how much she loved her.

'Would you be able to get out next Friday?' William asked after lighting cigarettes for all three of them.

'What's happening?' asked Patsy.

'We've got a gig at the Number One club.'

'You've got a gig!' she gasped. 'Seriously?'

'Yep, and I'd love you to come.'

‘I’d never be able to get into the Number One club,’ Susan said glumly. ‘I’m too little.’

‘I could,’ Patsy said hastily. The thought of being out, at night, with William made her head spin. It would be like a date. Okay, his other friends would be there, but what did that matter? She would be in a grown up environment with the most beautiful boy in the world.

‘Do you think Molly would let you go?’ he asked, dragging hard on his fag.

How could Molly object to Patsy mixing with grown ups, when she was happy to let her do it at Roger’s parties? She couldn’t tell William that though.

‘As long as I’m not back too late.’

‘Fantastic. It’ll be great to have you there Patsy.’

She wondered what he meant when he said things like that. Sometimes she caught him looking at her, but boys looked at her all the time. In the space of a few months, the rangy little girl had disappeared, and had been replaced by a beautiful young woman; who although was still short, had a perfect hourglass figure, pert breasts and the kind of smooth complexion most of the girls in her class only dreamed about. Jimmy Lee still said hello to her every day and none of the other boys teased her about her colour, or her mum’s occupation anymore. They were too busy gazing at her. But Patsy was wise enough to know it didn’t mean anything. They still wouldn’t want to be seen out with her.

When she got home, she found Molly in the very unusual location of the kitchen. Patsy had been cooking for herself since she was ten years old, as Molly wasn’t the most domesticated woman in the world. So when she got in and found her mother at the cooker, checking on the status of some fish fingers under the grill, she was astounded to see her doing something so ordinary.

‘Would you like to pop to the fish shop to get some chips Patsy?’ Molly asked. ‘I know fish fingers and chips are your favourite.’

‘Okay, yes thanks Mum.’

Molly picked up her purse from the table and took out half a crown, passing it to her daughter.

‘Cathy told me what happened last night,’ she said sheepishly. ‘You should have told me Patsy.’

‘I didn’t want you to worry about me. Can I stop going to the parties mum?’

‘I don’t know about that. I’ll have to speak to Roger, but I will make sure the girls keep an eye on you and that no one does that again. It shouldn’t have happened to you Patsy and I’m sorry.’

‘Can I go and see William’s group performing at the Number One club next week?’ she asked, feeling she had her mother right where she wanted.

‘The Number One club? In Kensal Rise?’

‘Yes.’

She could see Molly wanted to say no. But how could she? Her greed for money had put her daughter in danger from men far more harmful than the hippies that hung out at the Number One.

‘Alright. But I want you getting a taxi home. I’ll give you the money.’

‘Thanks Mum.’

Patsy left the house to go the chip shop and en route stopped off to tell William she would be able to go to the gig with him. He was clearly delighted, and hope rose in Patsy’s heart. Next Friday would be the nearest thing to a date she’d ever been on, and she couldn’t wait. Perhaps if William realised he loved her, they could run away together when she got to sixteen and he was eighteen. He wanted to go to Cambridge like his sister, and perhaps they could move in together. She could get a job to help support them while he studied. Then she could leave Talbot Road, and the brothel forever.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Sasha couldn't sleep. She'd chosen to stay in the biggest of her mother's spare rooms, but found it cloying and over-decorated. The king size bed was smothered in several covers that seemed to wrap themselves around her. Her feet felt trapped by the bars running along the bottom, and it was all very uncomfortable. Sasha was used to sleeping in a huge, remote country house, not a bedroom that looked out onto a busy road. She wondered if she would ever get used to the sound of buses roaring up and down, and drunken revellers who'd spilled out of the bars of Kings Road, shouting at one another and whistling for taxis.

Looking at her phone, she saw it was half past two, and decided to get up and make a cup of hot chocolate before trying to sleep again. At this ungodly hour, she was swamped by a feeling of self-pity. She was here living in her mother's house, exiled from her home by her husband and his mistress. After a lifetime of rejection, this was just another wound to her heart. She wondered what she'd do once Patty reappeared. There was no way she could live with her mother; so it looked like she'd have to accept Luca's offer of a flat of her own. As an illustrator she never earned more than a hundred thousand pounds a year, which meant she could live more than comfortably. But she didn't want to be saddled with a mortgage, and after all, Luca had made her a promise, let him stick to it.

Probably the only thing she had in common with her mother was a love of hot chocolate, and the conviction that it aided sleep. Patty's kitchen cupboards were full of jars of the stuff; from common or garden Cadburys, to Green and Blacks Organic, to brands Sasha had never even heard of that Patty had picked up on her travels. Sasha settled for a mug of Green and Blacks dark chocolate and took it into her mother's library.

There was something comforting about being surrounded by books, and Sasha found it the most welcoming room in the house. In 1997 Patty had paid thousands of pounds for a set of original Enid Blyton stories, and at the time Sasha had wondered why her mother wanted more children's books. She already possessed first editions of *The Chronicals of Narnia*, *Winnie the Pooh* and the *Paddington Bear* books. Now she'd added the first edition *Harry Potter* books to her collection. Surprisingly, there were no raunchy novels, nothing by Jackie Collins or Molly Parkin. The room resembled a children's library, and for the first time ever, Sasha could hazard a guess why. Patty hadn't had a normal childhood and maybe she wanted to make up for it now. Perhaps that was why she was so petulant – she was being the child she'd never got to be.

Sasha switched on the little old fashioned Bush radio Patty kept on a shelf, and listened to Classic FM. They were playing *Lascia ch'io pianga* from Handel's *Rinaldo*. It made Sasha smile, thinking of it as the music they always played to advertise the Harrods sale. She then thought of the year her mother opened the sale, bedecked in her favourite mink, arriving in an open top carriage, to be met by a fawning Mohammed Al Fayed. Sasha remembered watching the pair of them being interviewed on the TV, and Al Fayed cooing at Patty in her finery and saying she almost could be Jezebel Cole. Not seeming to realise how insulting he was being; comparing the novelist to a high class hooker.

Something within Sasha snapped. What was that famous theory? That all first novels were autobiographical? That any writer's first book was just a veiled version of their own life? Sasha last read *The Tale of Jessica Cole* when she was fifteen and at boarding school. Like Phillipa; her

friends had loved the dirty books, and being dorm mates with the author's daughter was a great bonus for them. Sasha was forced to read aloud a chapter each night, and all Sasha could remember was the embarrassment she felt at reading the rude bits. She remembered very little of the plot but wondered if she could find any clues to her mother's life in it.

Opening one of the cabinets, she pulled out the original 1977 copy of the book. The cover was pristine but the pages were that horrible yellow colour most old books became. Taking her hot chocolate, Sasha went back to bed, settling down to flick through the pages. The opening paragraph once came number ten in a poll of the most memorable first passages of books.

Jezebel Cole walked out of the Hilton and away from Sheikh Rahman; his fat, flabby body spent with passion. She strode along Park Lane, the eyes of every man upon her, alerted to her presence by the sound of her stilettos clicking upon the pavement. Their eyes would travel up her body, taking in her perfect figure and halo of golden hair. By the time they hit her azure blue eyes, they were in love with her. They would have walked across hot coals just to spend an hour in her company. Didn't they realise it was far easier than that? For a hundred quid, she'd happily open her legs to a leper.

Jezebel Cole was a convent girl gone wrong. Everyone knew that. Nothing like Patty, who had come from poverty. But as Sasha speed read through the book, one exchange between Jezebel and her mother, Colleen, sparked her interest;

Colleen had had some ridiculous surgery done on her breasts by a man she knew in Morocco. In Colleen's game, looks were everything, and her body was starting to let her down. Jezebel dreaded the day her body went the same way, but she was determined to avoid the one thing that was guaranteed to ruin a woman's figure – childbirth. As Colleen sat in the dining room of the Marlborough, looking like a ridiculous teenage doll, with pert breasts and a face that had started to melt, Jezebel had never felt more embarrassed to admit that this was her mother.

'What do you want Mum?' she asked, looking around, hoping to spot somebody she knew, just so she could leave her mother for someone more interesting.

'I need somewhere to hide,' Colleen replied, sipping her G&T. 'I didn't pay Bruce his cut this month and he's after me.'

'Why didn't you pay him?'

'I met someone,' Colleen said sheepishly. 'In Morocco. He was called Tamir. He said he needed some money to set up a business selling rugs. I stupidly gave him some cash and now I can't afford to pay Bruce.'

'Not my problem,' Jezebel shrugged.

'Do you want me arrested?' Colleen hissed. 'If I don't give him what he wants, he'll have me put away. Do you want your mother in prison?'

'Well it wouldn't be the first time would it?'

'You're forgetting what I did for you Jezebel. I laid on my back so you could go to that boarding school.'

'I never asked you to. And I never asked you to have policemen in your pockets. I'm not putting you up. Suki's recovering from an abortion, she needs some peace and quiet.'

'You're a selfish little whore Jezebel Cole.'

'And who made me into a whore mother? It was you who sold me to Bruce's friend don't forget.'

'I didn't sell you. Don't make things up Jezebel. You wanted to do it.'

'Oh how you choose to remember things,' Jezebel laughed. She threw a five pound note onto the table. 'Pay for your drink with that. Give the rest to Bruce, seeing as he means so much to you.'

Sasha had completely forgotten the fact that Jezebel's mother was supposed to be a prostitute too. So it *was* partially autobiographical. Had Molly sold Patty to a client? By all accounts she had protected Patty, so why would she expose her to prostitution? A chilling thought hit Sasha. If her mother had worked as a prostitute, did that mean her father was a client? Maybe she'd gone to that women's refuge to escape her profession, not a man. Maybe in truth she didn't know who her daughter's father was.

CHAPTER EIGHT

June 10th 1971

Sometimes Jessica thought she'd dreamt that horrible night last year. Mother had kept her promise and since then, all that had been required of her was to attend parties, look pretty and talk to the men. On Saturday there had been a party and Jessica had spent most of the evening talking to a very nice policeman called Paul. He was younger than the others and almost shy. There was no trying to touch Jessica and he didn't even talk about anything rude. They mainly chatted about music. Like W, Paul liked Pink Floyd, and they talked endlessly about Atom Heart Mother. Paul was quite good looking, with wavy fair hair and really bright blue eyes. Jessica quite fancied him and felt bad about this because of W. But she was fifteen now and the time was coming when she would want a boyfriend. W continued to treat her like a friend, confiding in her, and spending all his free time with her but nothing more. As much as she loved him, sometimes he made her feel dirty. She was okay as a friend, but the thought of anything else seemed to repel him.

Jessica was feeling happy. Today had been her fifteenth birthday and mother and the girls had thrown a little party for her. No men were allowed, except W who turned up with a present for her - a necklace she'd seen in Portabello Road market. It was a silver chain with a ceramic daisy on the end. Jessica thought it was the best present she'd ever got and Shirley made a joke, nudging her and telling her W must really like her to buy her such a nice gift. Suzi bought her T-Rex's album and a bracelet made from green beads. Cathy baked a cake and mother promised to take Jessica shopping at the weekend, to buy her a new dress. It was such a lovely party and she was sad when it ended. It made her realise how much she liked the house when there weren't any men coming and going.

There was a knock on Patsy's door and she quickly hid her diary under the covers.

'Come in,' she called.

The door opened. It was Molly. She looked a fright without her make up, wrapped up in her green housecoat, her frizzy red hair, framing her pale face making her look like a strange imitation of Queen Elizabeth I.

'Have you had a nice day darlin'?' she asked, sitting on the bed next to Patsy.

'It was brilliant. Thanks Mum.'

'I've just been speaking to Roger on the phone. It seems young Paul was quite taken with you on Saturday.'

Patsy blushed, her imagination running away with itself a little. What if he wanted to go out with her? Imagine that. Having a twenty-three year old policeman as a boyfriend. Karen Hayes would be even more jealous.

'He was telling me how Paul's shy around girls. Would you believe it? A nice looking lad like him's never had a girlfriend.'

'Really?'

‘Apparently so. He came from the countryside to join the police, and the London girls are just too much for him. That’s why he liked a sweet little thing like you.’

‘I don’t know what to say. I liked him too.’

Molly’s face lit up.

‘You did? You liked Paul?’

‘Yes.’

‘Oh Patsy, that’s such good news. Only Roger would like you to do Paul a favour.’

Excitement rose in Patsy. Did Roger want her to go out with Paul? She could show him London – she’d lived there all her life; and since she’d gone to that first gig of William’s last year, she’d started to go out more and more. Because she looked older, she always got served in pubs, and her and Susan were planning on going to a West End nightclub some day soon. Maybe Paul could go with them.

‘What have I got to do?’

Molly reached out, laying her hand upon Patsy’s, squeezing it. To her dismay, she could feel her mother was shaking.

‘I was your age when I first laid with a man. His name was Phinnaeus Reilly. He used to fix the boilers in the orphanage. He was a fine looking man, turned my head so he did. Failed to tell me he also had a wife and six kiddies. He broke my heart and that was when I came to London. A young girl’s head can be turned with her first love. Like the first man who lays a hand on you is the one you can’t let go of.’

Patsy remained silent, but all the while thought of that horrible policeman and his hands in her most intimate areas. She could easily let go of him. She was glad she hadn’t seen him since.

‘If you became a woman with someone you didn’t love, it’d make it easier for you.’

The penny finally dropped for Patsy. Her mother wanted her to sleep with Paul. She wanted her to lose her virginity to him. How could a mother ask such a thing of her daughter? It was disgusting.

‘No,’ she gasped, gathering her knees to her chin. ‘No, it’s wrong.’

‘You said yourself you liked Paul. Roger thinks it’s time he became a man. He hasn’t been with a girl either. I wouldn’t ask you to do it with anyone else Patsy. You’re my little girl and the thought of some man hurting you makes me angry. But Paul’s a nice lad. Gentle and kind. He’ll look after you.’

‘No. I want to choose who I sleep with. Not do it for money.’

‘Okay, I’ll tell Roger. He won’t be happy, and we don’t want to upset him; but I respect your wishes Patsy. I’m sorry I ever asked.’

‘It’s okay. But Roger has got to understand I’m not ready for anything like that now. Maybe when I’m older.’

‘Of course. I’m sorry Patricia. I always seem to let you down.’

Patsy didn’t sleep that night. Her mother’s words had tainted her. Every day at school she’d listen to her classmates bemoaning the fact their mothers wouldn’t let them see certain lads - frightened they’d end up ‘in the family way’, and yet her mother was encouraging it. Ironically, if she’d been going out with Paul on dates, she would probably have ended up giving in to him. She dreamt of her first time being with William, but that looked unlikely to happen; so to hang onto Paul, she would have done it. But that would have been different. The thought of doing it for money made her feel sick and dirty.

She’d recently confided in Susan about the parties and on the way to school the next day told her about Molly’s proposition. Susan didn’t see what the fuss was about. She reckoned that as someone who was unlikely to ever do it, she would be grateful to do it with anyone, money or not. Patsy was shocked on so many levels. For one, there was no reason why Susan shouldn’t sleep with someone. She was a pretty girl and even with her one arm, blokes still looked at her. And secondly, how could she even think that doing such a thing was acceptable?

They were almost leaving Talbot Road, when William caught up with them. He’d recently had his hair all chopped off and had a feather-cut, which made him look even more handsome, causing Patsy’s heart to flip and her guts to twist in disgust at what her mother had requested.

‘Mum and Dad have just agreed for me to have a party on Saturday. You two coming? You can invite some friends as well Patsy. It was your birthday too, yesterday after all.’

‘We’d love to,’ she gasped. ‘Is it in your house?’

‘Yeah, Mum and Dad are going to the theatre for the night.’ His eyes travelled to Patsy’s neck and saw she was wearing the necklace he’d given her.

‘The necklace really suits you,’ he said.

‘Thanks,’ she blushed. ‘I’ll never take it off.’

‘Come on Patsy,’ Susan moaned. ‘We’ll be late for school.’

It was the fifth formers’ last day. The exams were over and everyone was excited to be finally breaking free. Patsy envied them. She had another year left at school and couldn’t wait for it to be over. She was determined to get a job and move into a little flat somewhere. She didn’t want to disown Molly – she loved her mother a lot, but she wanted to get away from that brothel and the dangers it held.

At breaktime, the younger kids looked on at the fifth formers, wishing they could be them. They were allowed to write messages of good luck on each others’ shirts; a couple of them had brought in flour to have fights with, and even the teachers were laughing and joking with them - as if now they were no longer schoolkids, they were somehow equal. Patsy stood watching it all going on and wished she had a time machine that could forward it on a year, and it was her who was on the threshold of adulthood - then her escape plan could become a reality.

She blushed to her core when she saw, from out of a group of boys throwing flour at each other, Jimmy Lee emerge. Even in his baggy white shirt covered in ink scrawls, white flour caking his thick dark hair, he was still gorgeous. He walked with a confident swagger, his eyes fixed directly on Patsy.

‘He’s coming over to you,’ Susan gasped.

‘I can see that!’

He stepped up to them, and without saying a word, took hold of Patsy’s hand; pulling her away from Susan, round the corner to the sheds where the sports equipment was kept. Just like that horrible policeman, he pushed her against the wall and before Patsy could get used to the feeling of her body being jolted against it, his mouth was upon her. But unlike the policeman, Jimmy wasn’t slobbering or nasty. Patsy’s hesitance came from the fact that the best looking boy in the school was kissing her and she wasn’t quite sure what to do. Finally she gave into it, wrapping her arms around his neck and getting used to the strange feeling of his tongue probing her mouth. It was the first time anyone had kissed her like this and she was so excited she thought she was going to burst.

Finally Jimmy broke free, that lopsided smile on his face. Patsy was half expecting his mates to jump out and start laughing, but they didn’t.

‘I’ve been wanting to do that for ages,’ he said. ‘Will you go out with me Patsy?’

‘What?!’ she gasped.

‘Go out with me. Would you like to go to the pictures on Friday night?’

‘I’d love to,’ she replied. ‘You really mean it?’

‘Yeah. We could go and see *Planet of the Apes*.’

‘Alright.’

‘Great. Meet me outside the Roxy at seven o’clock.’

‘I will. I promise.’

They parted, Jimmy striding off back to his mates; Patsy, floating on air, back to Susan. She was rather hoping her best friend would be pleased for her; instead Susan warned her about Jimmy. She’d heard rumours that him and a few other boys from North Ken were going to start a fight with some boys from St Boltolphs down the road, as a way of celebrating finishing school. Patsy didn’t care. She wasn’t even sure if she liked Jimmy all that much. He might have been gorgeous but he was trouble - she knew that - but at least if she had a boyfriend she stood a chance of getting away from her miserable life.

Going home, she wondered if she should tell her mum about her the date with Jimmy. After what Molly had requested of her last night, she could hardly object to her daughter being alone with a boy. What worried her more was the fact that Molly had a big mouth and would end up telling everyone, and invariably William would find out. Patty didn’t want him to know about

Jimmy. Jimmy was rough like her - a piece of her real world. William was the only goodness in her life, and if she could keep all the bad things away from him she would.

As she went in the front door she could hear shouting, but that wasn't exactly an unusual noise – the girls were always arguing, either with each other or with punters who were refusing to pay. It was only when coming closer, Patsy could hear the voice was male, and she realised it was Roger's. Just the thought of him struck fear into her heart and she almost turned and walked the other way. Then she heard Molly cry out and she rushed into the lounge to find her mother at the table, crying and trying to writhe away from Roger as he clutched her hair.

'P-Patsy just go,' she gasped.

'Here's the ungrateful little bitch,' he shouted, letting go of Molly and storming to Patsy. Before she knew anything, the right side of her face exploded and she went hurtling into the wall, falling down onto the floor.

'Don't hurt her Roger,' Molly sobbed.

'Do you want to go into care you little bitch?' Roger said as he looked down at Patsy. She started to wince as the horrific pain spread across her face. She checked her teeth with her tongue – convinced he'd knocked some of them out. 'You either fucking well go with Paul or I shut this place down. Your slut of a mother will go to prison and you'll go into care. Or you know what? I just might make out you were helping her and they'll send you to Borstal. Do you want that?'

'No,' she cried, clutching her cheek.

'Well then, do as I say.'

He looked at Molly.

'You wanna teach your daughter some gratitude.'

He walked out and Molly rushed over to Patsy, helping her up.

'Oh Patricia I'm so sorry,' she cried. 'I'm so sorry my darlin'.'

Patsy couldn't remember ever feeling this frightened before. She'd always known Roger was a bully, but she didn't know he was capable of such physical violence. For a moment she hated her mother for being a whore. Why couldn't Molly be like other mums and go out and do cleaning or work in a shop to make ends meet? Why did she have to have a mother who was going to force her into losing her virginity for money - just because of her own failures?

'I'll take care of you, I promise,' Molly cooed, leading Patsy over to a chair and sitting her down. 'I'll get you on the pill so you can't get pregnant. You won't have to do it with anyone else. I promise you that.'

'Until Roger decides he wants me to do it with someone else,' Patsy sniffed. 'I wish I was dead.'

Something in Patsy died that day. Even the excitement about going on a date with Jimmy was ebbing away. She wasn't a normal fifteen year old, wondering if this boy was going to be 'the

one' – after all she had been promised to someone else. She told Susan at school the next day, but made her promise not to tell William. When she was with him she could pretend she wasn't her. His house was so bright, and his family so normal; for a while she was part of it and she didn't want it tainted in any way.

Friday came and Patsy spent ages making up her face to hide the bruise she'd got from Roger's slap. Errol had got her some foundation meant for women with a darker skin tone than her, and the thick, smelly gloop made her look as though she had a tan, but it was the best she could do in the circumstances. She put on lots of mascara, and piled her hair on top of her head. She looked young and fashionable and for a while she could forget that next Wednesday, PC Paul Hartley was coming over to sleep with her. She wondered what Roger would do if she slept with Jimmy tonight. If she wasn't a virgin would Paul be so interested? It was a fleeting thought, then she pushed it away, knowing she couldn't risk upsetting Roger. She'd seen what he was capable of the other day. It was best just to get it over with and be done with it.

It was just Patsy's luck that as she left her house, so did William. He was carrying his guitar case, heading for rehearsals at the little church hall down the road. He took in her make up and short red dress and realised she was obviously off somewhere important.

'Got a date?' he joked.

'What has Susan said?' she snapped.

'I'm sorry,' he frowned. 'I was joking. You look nice. I thought maybe someone had asked you out.'

'No. I'm just going to the pictures with a friend.'

'What you going to see?'

'Planet of the Apes.'

'Okay, well have fun.'

'Thanks.'

She scurried off. Wishing it was him she was going to the pictures with instead of Jimmy. With William she would stand a chance of a better life; but as good looking and charming as Jimmy was, he was just like every other bloke she knew. He and his brothers lived with his mum and dad in a cramped council flat, and Patsy doubted if he had any ambitions to do much with his life. With him, she'd just end up another discontented housewife. But then again, even that was better than being a prostitute.

Reaching The Roxy, a little cinema on Ladbroke Grove, Patsy was shocked to find Mark Clifford, Jimmy's best friend, and not Jimmy himself, waiting outside. For a moment she was frightened, wondering what the boys were up to. Were they going to ambush her, or tease her in some way? She paused, wondering if she should just keep walking, but Mark spotted her. He waved, then walked towards her, his hands buried deep in the pockets of his flared jeans.

'Alright Patsy,' he said.

‘Where’s Jimmy?’

‘That’s why I’ve come ‘ere. He’s been arrested and put on remand.’

‘What?’

‘We all got into a fight with St Boltoph’s the other day and Jimmy pushed this one boy and his head cracked on the pavement. Depending on how he does, Jimmy might be looking at attempted murder.’

‘Oh my God.’

‘Soon as I was let out of the station, he told me to come and find you, but I couldn’t remember where you lived. He said you were meeting him tonight.’

‘I was. Thanks for letting me know Mark.’

‘No worries. Do you want me to walk you home?’

‘No I’ll be fine. Thanks.’

He ran off, leaving Patsy feeling stunned. She didn’t know what to do with herself. She felt flattered. Despite being arrested, Jimmy still had her on his mind, and thought enough of her to make sure she wasn’t stranded. She wasn’t worried about him being a potential criminal; she was just impressed by his kindness.

She couldn’t face going home. Friday nights were hell. After closing time, men would come knocking on the door - without appointments - drunken and hoping for a good time. If the girls were busy they’d tell them to go away. If they weren’t busy they’d let them in and the house would become chaotic. They always ended up vomiting on the stairs and would try and flush their Durex down the toilet, and it would never go. Patsy wanted to be as far away from it as possible.

She took a leap of faith and caught the bus to Westbourne Grove, where William was rehearsing with Major Tom. She hoped he wouldn’t mind her watching them. Approaching the church hall doors, she heard William’s guitar and her heart soared. There was something ironic about entering a sacred building to be met with the sweet sounds of William playing the opening riffs of *Wild Thing*. They always closed their gigs with it, as it was a crowd pleaser. Nigel, Adam and Graeme, the other members of the band were at the back of the stage, fussing round the drum kit, whilst William practised. He spotted Patsy and stopped playing, a look of concern on his face.

‘Are you alright Pats?’ he asked, jumping down from the stage and walking towards her. Stopping halfway, because the lead to the amp wouldn’t go any further.

‘Yeah, my friend can’t make it. I don’t want to go home. Would the boys mind if I stayed here?’

‘I shouldn’t think so,’ he smiled. He looked to the stage.

‘Guys, you don’t mind Patsy staying here to watch us do you?’

‘Can she go and get me a choc ice?’ Adam called out, without looking round.

‘I think I can manage that,’ Patsy smiled.

William took a pound note out of his back pocket and passed it to her.

‘I still can’t get used to these,’ he laughed. ‘I keep thinking it’s ten bob. Can you go and get us all a choc ice?’

‘Even me?’

‘Of course you. You’re our guest of honour.’

CHAPTER NINE

From 'The Tale of Jezebel Cole' page 119

Falling in love had done something to Jezebel. For the first time ever, she regretted her sexual history. Like some prim little 1950s girl, she wished she'd never slept with anyone else, and Salim could be her first. Terribly old-fashioned for the 1970s, she knew, but there was something primitive in all women that longed for that special man to make his mark on her. Her first had been a young police officer, a colleague of Bruce, the superintendent who used to bully and blackmail Colleen. Philip was twenty-three years old and a proper country bumpkin. He'd never been with a girl, and Bruce thought his first foray into the world of sex should be with another young virgin. And who better than Colleen's daughter, Jezebel?

Even today, ten years and hundreds of lovers later, Jezebel could recall that first time in one of the squalid rooms her mother let out for sex - Jezebel had refused to let her own room be used. All that day, the girls had given her advice, trying to prepare her for what was going to happen. But nothing stopped her feeling nervous. The only thing that helped was when her mother's West Indian friend Annette let her take a few tokes of her joint. It calmed Jezebel down enough to go through with her mission.

Philip had been gentle, and nothing like the brute all the women she knew had painted men to be. After much fumbling with clothes and Johnnies and things, the actual act barely lasted a minute. Not because Philip was overcome with his desire for the nubile fifteen year old beneath him. It was because he swiftly lost interest and shrivelled - to coin a phrase - like a snowflake in the rain. He kept apologising to Jezebel, although she wasn't sure why. It had been quite painful and uncomfortable and she was grateful for its premature conclusion.

He got dressed and looked away while she slipped her petticoat back on. He lit them both a cigarette and they lay together smoking while he confessed as to why he'd never had sex with a girl before. Shyness had nothing to do with it; the truth was that he was gay. He gave Jezebel five pounds and begged her never to tell his superintendent, because if it came out, it could ruin his career. It was then that Jezebel came up with the first of many spiffing plans. She could keep Bruce happy by pretending to sleep with Philip, and in the process no-one would ever know the truth about his sexual preferences.

After he left, Jezebel put the five pounds into her secret box. With enough money saved, as soon as she left school she'd be able to escape her bitch of a mother.

The front door bell rang, jolting Sasha from her reading. She put down the book and looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. It was ten o'clock. The person at the door was probably Phillipa, who was picking her up to take her over to Edna Clapp's house. She'd been so engrossed in her mother's first book, she'd lost track of time. It made her head spin to think Patty had written all of this while in the women's refuge, with her as a newborn baby. The Tale of Jezebel Cole was a fantastic book and Sasha still had no idea how much of it was autobiographical. At least she now knew Colleen was based on Molly, her own grandmother; but had she 'sold' Patty's virginity to a policeman? Surely not if she was so protective of her as everyone claimed.

Phillipa was looking very jaunty in a black off the shoulder jumper and electric blue skinny jeans. It was still hard for Sasha to ever imagine her being a police officer, but under the bright clothes and jolly, head girl persona, she was a good detective who got results.

‘Ready to go?’ she fizzed.

‘I certainly am,’ Sasha replied, shutting the door behind her.

‘Can we stop off at my friend’s bar? I borrowed the DVD of *The Wire* from him six months ago and I still haven’t returned it. He hasn’t actually threatened physical violence yet, but I’m not sure how much longer he can hold out.’

She laughed and skipped off the step before Sasha could agree or not.

They drove to Gloucester Road, where Phillipa’s friend Seth owned a wine bar. He’d been Jason’s best friend for many years, and after Jason’s death, Phillipa had inherited him. The bar was called Lexi’s and was close to the tube station. Phillipa rang the bell and stood on tip toe, looking through slats in the glass panel to try and spot her friend.

The door opened and Sasha was suitably impressed with what she saw. Seth was gorgeous – six foot, with short black hair, huge dark eyes and a fine dimple finishing off that well-boned, chiselled jaw. It gave Sasha a jolt to actually fancy someone new. All that sort of thing had lain dormant for quite some time.

‘Hello darling,’ Phillipa said in that busy way of hers, reaching up and kissing him upon the cheek. ‘Seth this is Sasha, I’m doing some work for her at the moment.’

‘Come in,’ he smiled. ‘Come in.’

He looked quite the thing in his smart white shirt and tie, his black apron tied around his waist. He went behind the bar and offered the women a drink, though it disconcerted Sasha a bit to find his eyes focused mainly upon her.

‘I’ll have an orange juice please,’ she said.

‘Yeah me too,’ Phillipa replied. ‘Although I must pop to the loo.’

She rushed off. Seth and Sasha looked at each other and laughed.

‘So you’ve got Filly chasing your husband then?’ he asked, putting two glasses upon the marble bar.

‘No, my mother,’ she replied. ‘She’s gone missing.’

‘Sorry to hear that. Any idea where she’s gone?’

‘I’ve no idea. She left a note saying she’d gone to Paris and hasn’t been seen since.’

He halted what he was doing, looking up at her and furrowing his brow. Sasha felt like a silly schoolgirl, quivering under his gaze.

‘Not Patty Belleville?’ he said.

‘Yes,’ she replied. ‘The very one. How did you guess?’

‘I remember seeing you on the Natasha Murray Show. Blimey. What a small world? My aunt used to be her dressmaker.’

‘Not Abie Cohen?’

‘That’s her.’

‘Oh my God!’ Sasha gasped, a hundred memories of the eccentric little Jewish woman flooding her brain. Patty liked to wear designer clothes, but would get Abie to come over to the house and customise things so no one else had anything like it. Abie died several years ago and Patty had never found another dressmaker she got on with.

‘I remember we went to Abie’s seventieth birthday party. Were you there?’

‘I was. God that must be twenty years ago. I was about ten.’

‘I was thirteen.’ She laughed. ‘So I probably wouldn’t have spoken to you anyway. You know what it’s like to be that age, all you want to do is talk to older kids.’

‘It is a coincidence though. Hang on, Sasha; aren’t you married to Luca Fletcher?’

‘For now, yes.’

‘Sounds intriguing.’

Before she could answer, Phillipa came back, taking Seth’s DVD from her bag and laying it on the counter.

‘My aunt Abie used to be Sasha’s mum’s dressmaker,’ Seth told Phillipa as he poured her drink. ‘Coincidence eh?’

‘Yes, what a big coincidence. So have you met before?’

‘We were at the same party about twenty years ago,’ laughed Sasha. ‘But I doubt if we would have spoken.’

‘Look, why don’t you two come here next Friday?’ Seth said. ‘We’ve a Z-List bash going on. It’s some Big Brother contestant from 2005 or something and no one remembers him, but he’s ordered ten grand’s worth of food and drink. You two could come along and make up the numbers.’

‘I can’t,’ Phillipa said. ‘It’s a busy weekend.’

‘What about you Sasha?’

‘Why not?’ she replied. She hated the thought of spending hours with vacuous celebrities - she’d done enough of that in her lifetime with her mother then Luca. But she did like the thought

of seeing Seth again. 'I'll bring my little sister. If they're a Z lister, then she probably knows them.'

'Not bringing Luca then?'

'No. We're having some time apart.'

'I see. Sorry to hear that.'

Phillipa finished her drink, slamming the glass down on the bar.

'When you two have stopped organising your social calendar, we have an old lady to visit Sasha.'

'So we do,' she smiled. 'See you next week Seth.'

'Look forward to it,' he grinned, and Sasha's tummy did a funny little flip.

As they walked to the car, Phillipa started giggling.

'Ooh Seth fancies you,' she said.

'Don't be silly.'

'Sasha I've known him for fifteen years. I know the look he gets when he fancies someone, and he fancies you.'

They got into the car and Phillipa seemed keen to carry the conversation on.

'Seth's a really good boyfriend. He was with his last girlfriend for six years. And it was she who left him.'

'Why did she leave him?'

'She wanted marriage and babies and Seth was just happy how they were. She left him for a banker called Austin, and within a year they were married and had twins.'

'So is Seth single now?'

'So you like him too,' she giggled.

'I didn't say that. I was just curious.'

'Yes, he is single. Not many girls would put up with the hours he puts in behind that bar.'

'What about you? Don't you want a boyfriend?'

'Not really. I've things to take into consideration.'

'I think most men would accept your job. You only do it for money.'

'It's not just my job.' She a big deal of looking out the window at a junction that was perfectly clear. 'It's Maisie.'

‘Maisie?’

She finally moved off.

‘I don’t tell people about her when I work for them because I’m worried they’ll think I’m going to let them down. She’s my daughter.’

‘You’ve got a daughter?!’ Sasha gasped.

‘Yes,’ she smiled. ‘She’s twelve. She’s in her first year at boarding school. I didn’t want her to go, but my mother found her a really nice one close to where they live. It’s much easier with Maisie being away at school. But I do miss her.’

‘I never realised.’

‘You had no reason to. That’s why I can’t go to Seth’s party next weekend. It’s Maisie’s exiat and we’re taking Mum out for her birthday. It’ll be the first time I’ve seen my daughter in six weeks, and I wouldn’t miss it for anything.’

‘My mum usually forgot my exiats. I’d end up staying at school or going home with some friend. They didn’t normally want me there; but their parents felt sorry for me.’

‘That’s very sad. Maybe your mum missed you more than you think. You do like to put a brave face on for your kids. You don’t want them to feel guilty for being independent.’

Sasha guessed Phillipa was just being kind about Patty. To her mother, children were an inconvenience and boarding school was a blessing in disguise – somewhere to shove them away and forget they ever existed.

Edna Clapp lived on a sprawling estate on the Harrow Road. It was one of those 1960s architectural dreams gone wrong. Whoever thought housing people in tiny boxes, one on top of the other, must have been crazy. It wasn’t even as though Edna had come from a slum clearance - she’d willingly given up a beautiful house in W2, that would eventually go onto become one of the most expensive areas of London. After entering various gates and walking down badly lit alleys, they found the lifts to take them to the fourth floor of Greening House. Both women tried to avoid breathing so as not to take in the pungent smell of urine, and there was more graffiti than wall surrounding them. Sasha pitied people who lived in these places, and felt that at least she had something to thank her mother for. Without Patty’s ruthless ambition, they would have just been another single parent family, stuck in a slum like this.

There was a collection of stone garden ornaments outside Edna’s street door, which Sasha found a sad sight. It was as though this stretch of concrete compensated for the garden she didn’t have. Phillipa knocked on the door and it was soon opened by a rangy little woman with thinning grey, curly hair. Her face was so wrinkled and weathered it was hard to tell if she was seventy or ninety.

‘Hello love,’ she said in that reedy voice only old women had.

‘Hello Edna?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’m Phillipa Hardcastle, this is Sasha Fletcher, Patsy Keegan’s daughter. We spoke on the phone.’

‘Oh yes. Come on in love.’

She led them into the hall, and Sasha’s ears were blasted with the sound of Formula 1 coming from the TV - not the sort of thing one imagined a little old lady to be watching! Stepping into the tatty living room it soon became evident who the viewer was. A large man sat on the sofa in front of the television. A polo shirt barely covered his fat stomach, and in his sausage-like fingers smouldered a cigarette.

‘Wayne, these ladies have come to talk to me,’ Edna said. ‘Turn that telly down.’

‘Talk to them in the kitchen,’ he snapped, followed by a large belch, for which he didn’t apologise.

Edna pulled a face and led them to the little kitchen at the front of the flat. There was a Formica gateleaf table with two chairs by it, which Edna told Sasha and Phillipa to sit at. She put the kettle on and pulled over the chair that was wedged between the washing machine and the sink.

‘Is Wayne your son?’ Phillipa asked.

‘Yes. Lazy fat sod,’ she sighed.

‘Does he live with you?’

‘Yeah. Wish he’d get a bleeding job though. Get from under my feet.’ She narrowed her eyes and leaned forward, looking at Sasha intently.

‘You look like your mother,’ she declared. ‘Was your father white?’

‘I don’t know,’ Sasha replied. ‘She left him before I was born.’

‘Ain’t you posh?’ Edna smiled, exposing a set of gravestone-like false teeth. ‘Old Patsy must have done well for herself.’

Phillipa and Sasha looked at each other.

‘Have you no idea who Patsy became?’ Phillipa asked.

‘No.’

From her bag, Phillipa pulled a copy of the new edition of *Two Hearts*. The photograph on the back was a black and white one of Patty - airbrushed, botoxed, lying across a silk sheet, looking provocatively up at the camera like some 1950s starlet.

‘That’s her!?’ Edna screeched. ‘Little Patsy Keegan?’ She turned the book over, examining the cover. ‘Patty Belleville? I’ve ‘eard of her. I never realised it was Patsy.’

‘Does she look a lot different then?’ Sasha asked.

Edna turned the book back over and looked at the photograph again.

‘Yeah, she does. You can see it’s her around the eyes I suppose, but the rest of the face is different. ‘ang on.’

She passed the book back to Phillipa and levered herself up, shuffling out the room. Phillipa put it back into her bag and looked at Sasha.

‘Did your mother have plastic surgery?’ she asked.

‘Not that I remember. She had botox but no surgery. Do you think we’ve got the wrong person?’

‘No. I shouldn’t think so. It’s too much of a coincidence. If Edna last saw Patsy when she was sixteen, I guess she’d look a lot different now wouldn’t she?’

‘I suppose so.’

Edna returned, clutching a photograph. She passed it to Sasha while she set about making a pot of tea. The photo was of a group of children standing outside one of the houses on Talbot Road. Patsy stood out like a sore thumb – the only brown child of the bunch. Sasha could see it was her mother, although it was quite strange to see her as a child of around ten or eleven. She was a pretty little thing, with an impish grin and frizzy hair tied back in a ponytail. She stood next to a little blonde girl, her lank hair flopping over her face. Sasha wondered if it was Susan. She passed the photograph to Phillipa.

‘Is it her?’ she asked.

‘Yes, I think so.’

She looked at the photo.

‘Which one is Susan?’ she asked Edna.

‘The one next to Patsy.’

She brought the teapot over to the table and got three mugs. She poured three cups of very strong tea and called out to Wayne if he wanted one. He ignored her and she took that as a no. She sat down wearily, taking the red-hot mug in both hands, as if she couldn’t feel it.

‘Thanks for meeting with us Mrs Clapp,’ Phillipa said, passing her the photograph. ‘We need to find out a bit more about Patsy as a girl. None of her present day acquaintances know where she is and we’ve reason to believe that her disappearance is connected to something that happened years ago. Do you know where she went when the brothel was raided?’

‘Oh she left before the brothel was raided love. A good few weeks beforehand. No one knew where she’d gone. Well, except my Susan. Turned out she was living in a house in Battersea. When I got arrested for handling stolen goods and put in Holloway, the kids were taken into

care; but because Susan was nearly seventeen, she was allowed to make her own way. She went to stay with Patsy over in Battersea.'

'My mother never mentioned living in Battersea,' Sasha said. 'I was born in a women's refuge in Hammersmith.'

'Ow old are you love?'

'Thirty-three.'

'Well you must have been born in 1976 then. I'm talking about 1972. By 1976 they weren't living together anymore. Susan had taken up with this drug addict called Ray, fucking waste of space, 'scuse my French. When she got pregnant, I wanted her to have an abortion. Susan wasn't capable of having a baby. Too stupid in the head. She didn't listen to me. She had it. Within five days, decided she couldn't cope and turned up on my doorstep with Shannon.'

'Shannon?'

'Me grand-daughter. I brought her up while Miss Susan went off gallivanting, doing God knows what.'

'Does Shannon still hear from her mother?' Phillipa asked.

'The occasional letter or card. Shannon lives over in Carpenter House with her daughter and her grandson. You could go and see her.'

Sasha did the arithmetic in her head. Shannon Clapp was the same age as her and yet she was a grandmother. She was thirty-three and a grandmother!

'Last time she heard from Susan was when Tashan was born last year. Don't ask me 'ow Susan found out she'd become a great-grandmother but she 'ad, and she wrote to Shannon and said she was living in Brighton with a woman called Rosemarie.'

'A woman!' exclaimed Sasha. 'She's a lesbian.'

'She's any port in a storm more like,' Edna tutted. 'Don't think my Susan's ever been fussy to be honest.'

'Was my mother ever a prostitute?' Sasha blurted out. She hadn't planned on asking that; but all that she'd read in Jezebel Cole was haunting her.

'Couldn't tell you love. I wouldn't be surprised if that copper put her on the game, just to taunt old Molly.'

'What copper?' asked Phillipa, clearly interested as this was concerning her former profession.

'Roger something. He was a big-wig alright. Made a healthy living from sponging off brothels. Before he took Molly's over, it was an alright place. The girls were happy and I think Molly did all she could to protect Patsy from it. But he got his mucky paws on the place and suddenly they had all and sundry turning up.'

‘What happened to him?’

‘Well I heard on the grapevine that along with Molly’s being shut down, he got done for corruption. As far as I know he got put away and everything.’

‘Can you remember his full name?’

‘Sorry love. I know it was Roger. He was a big chap. Must have been about forty-odd back then. Had terrible evil eyes, like they were looking right through you.’

‘And you think he might have been pimping my mother out?’

‘Who knows? Do you want me to ring Shannon and ask her to come over? She might be able to tell you where Susan is.’

‘We’ll go to her,’ Phillipa said. ‘Could you ring her and ask if it’s okay?’

‘Course I can.’

The old woman levered herself up and walked out again. Phillipa kicked the door shut and leaned forward, looking at Sasha.

‘I need to find out who this officer was,’ she said. ‘Find out why Patsy disappeared shortly before the raid happened.’

‘This might be a long shot, but I’ve been reading my mother’s first book. You know they say all author’s first books are semi-autobiographical? Well, I decided to read Jezebel Cole to see if there were any clues in it. Jezebel’s mother is a prostitute who is being bullied by a superintendent. He forces her to allow Jezebel to sleep with a young police officer who reckons he’s a virgin. Truth is, he’s gay and he and Jezebel come to an arrangement, where he pretends to sleep with her just to keep the other copper happy. Do you think there’s a chance this young officer was real and he knew the raid was going to happen and tipped Patty off?’

‘It’s a possibility,’ Phillipa pondered. ‘He may have taken pity on her. If I can find out who this senior officer was, I might be able to work out who the young one was.’

Edna returned to the room, standing in the door way.

‘Shannon says it’s fine. It’s number eleven Carpenter House.’

‘That’s fantastic, thank you,’ smiled Phillipa. ‘Hopefully we’re starting to get somewhere.’

They left Edna’s and went across another shabby courtyard to a smaller block on the other side. Some of the windows were boarded up, others were open with greying net curtain blowing out from them. It was like everyone who lived here had given up all hope of making their place more like a home.

‘I used to spend my days patrolling round places like this,’ Phillipa said more to herself than Sasha. ‘They were dumps then. They’re even bigger dumps now.’

Number Eleven was on the ground floor. Outside was a little patio – no plants or decorations. The door had iron bars secured over it and Sasha felt overwhelmed with sadness that a baby was growing up in this desolation.

To Sasha's shame, Shannon Clapp was exactly how she imagined her. Overweight with greasy hair slicked back into a tight pony tail; she wore a pink velour tracksuit and a chunky but cheap looking gold necklace around her neck. She looked old for her age, as if life had ground her down before she'd even had a chance to live it. She let the women into the flat, which was surprisingly smart. There was laminate flooring, comfy looking sofas and a huge flat screen television. Sasha saw it through Phillipa's eyes – wondering where these obviously poor people got the money for such expensive goods.

Without offering them a drink, Shannon sat down upon a sofa next to a whippet thin mixed race girl who, like her mother wore her hair in a ponytail, except she had hers fixed to one side. A row of gold studs travelled up her earlobe and moved as she chewed gum loudly. She had both eyes fixed on the TV; absent-mindedly feeding a much darker skinned baby who was laying in a portable seat on the floor.

'Sit down,' Shannon ordered them, fetching a packet of Windsor Blue from the coffee table. She offered one to Phillipa and Sasha and they both refused. She lit one up, blowing the smoke almost directly in the baby's face. Sasha winced for him.

'I'm Phillipa, this is Sasha. Your grandmother said you knew where your mother was.'

'Where she was last year you mean?' Shannon snapped.

Suddenly the baby hit the bottle out of his mother's hand and started screaming, his little face creasing up.

'For fuck's sake Lacie, take Tashan outside,' Shannon shouted. 'I can't hear myself fucking speak.'

Kissing her teeth, the young girl got up, bending down and picking up her baby's chair. She carried him out the room, and stomped up the stairs, which was followed shortly by a slamming door.

'Fucking kids,' hissed Shannon, sucking hard on her cigarette.

'Have you any others?' Phillipa asked.

'Yeah, my other daughter Emily, but she's with her dad.'

'Do you look after Tashan while Lacie goes to school?' Sasha asked.

'She left school last year. Are you here to talk about my mother or are you really from Social Services?'

'No, we are here to talk about your mother. I'm sorry. I was just thinking it must be hard for you, looking after your daughter and your grand-daughter.'

'I manage.'

‘So have you ever lived with Susan?’ Phillipa asked.

‘No. She gave me to Nan when I was five weeks old. I last saw her in 2001. She’d won a couple of grand on the lottery and came back here, flashing her cash about. Stupid cow met this bloke called Gerry and he conned her out of it. She then bugged off and I didn’t know where to. We didn’t hear from her anymore then until last year when Tashan was born. She sent Lacie a card with her new address in it. Apparently she’s now shacked up with some bird called Rosemarie.’

‘Your grandmother tells us she had lesbian relationships prior to this.’

‘Oh yeah, Mum’s lived with men and women.’

‘Have you been to see her?’ Sasha asked.

‘Do I look like I could afford the fare to Brighton?’

Sasha and Phillipa remained silent, both obviously thinking the same thing. All this furniture and equipment cost considerably more than a cheap off-peak fare to Brighton.

‘Anyway,’ she continued. ‘I don’t want to see her. She means nothing to me.’

‘I guess she’d like to see Tashan.’

‘Why? She weren’t interested when Lacie was born.’

‘Did she ever mention my mother?’ Sasha asked.

‘She used to say she was friends with Patty Belleville when she was younger but I didn’t believe her. Seems she was telling the truth.’

‘She and my mum lived together for a while when they were teenagers. Do you know why they stopped?’

‘No idea,’ she shrugged. ‘Do you want me to go and get Susan’s address for you?’

‘Please.’

She got up and left the room. From upstairs, the sound of Tashan crying could still be heard, and all Sasha got from this place was a sense of misery. It was hard to ever imagine anyone ever smiling or having a laugh.

‘All this seems a world away from Patty,’ she sighed. ‘It’s hard to think these people came from the same place as her.’

‘She had a gift and she made the most of it,’ Phillipa said. ‘You should be grateful. This could be you.’

‘Yes, I suppose I do have something to be thankful to the old bag for.’

Shannon re-entered the room clutching a piece of paper. She passed it to Sasha.

‘She might not even be there now. She’s always moving around.’

‘Thanks,’ replied Sasha. ‘I doubt if Mum kept in touch with her, but she might know something.’

Phillipa and Sasha left Shannon and headed back to the car; Phillipa joking that she may well find it propped up on bricks. Thankfully it was okay, and they could drive off. Phillipa said she would drop Sasha at Ladbroke Grove Station, as she wanted to go home and start investigating this corrupt officer.

‘I’ll call Susan if you like,’ Sasha said. ‘Would you be able to go to Brighton?’

‘I should be able to. Obviously not next weekend because I’m going home, but before that should be fine.’

‘I finally feel as though I’m getting somewhere.’

All the while they were chatting, the radio was playing in the background. It was the twelve o’clock news. Sasha normally ignored it, until she heard her mother’s name.

‘An Irish farmer has claimed he has seen missing novelist Patty Belleville,’ the young female newsreader said. Phillipa reached out and turned it up. *‘Seamus Lockhart of Ballyboden, just outside of Dublin, reckoned he saw Ms Belleville who went missing in November, at a service station on the M50. Irish police are currently checking CCTV footage to see if it was indeed the writer.’*

The newsreader went onto another subject, and Sasha reached down, turning the radio off, looking at Phillipa.

‘Ireland? Why would she go to Ireland?’

‘I’ve no idea. It might not even be her. This guy could just be saying it for publicity.’

‘My grandmother was from Dublin. Do you think Patty could be going back to visit her roots?’

‘Well why wouldn’t she tell you that? They’re your roots too.’

‘I don’t know. I need to phone that PC Satchwell and see if she’s contacted the Irish police. If it is Mum, I want to know why she’s gone to Ireland and not told us. I knew darn well her maiden name was Keegan - I was born Sasha Keegan; so it’s obvious we’ve got Irish roots. Why has she gone off like this?’

Sasha got home and groaned inwardly when she saw Rorie waiting on the doorstep. Her sister was the last person she wanted to see. Rorie was so demanding, and all Sasha wanted to do was spend the afternoon on the phone to the various people she needed to call.

‘Did you hear the news?’ Rorie snapped.

‘Yes, I’m going to phone PC Satchwell and find out if she’s heard anything.’

‘Well I think we should go over to Dublin ourselves. Mother needs to come home and stop this silly charade. It’s getting so boring Sash. All anyone ever wants to talk about is Patty bloody Belleville.’

Sasha said nothing and led her sister into the house. She presumed Dana had told her that she was living here, because she certainly hadn’t.

‘Now, I’ve asked Giles Hornby and he’s said we can use his jet. He...’

‘Rorie shut up!’ Sasha snapped. ‘Will you please just shut up?’

She walked into the living room and flopped down upon the sofa. All of the days events were swirling around in Sasha’s head and she needed peace and quiet. Not her overgrown brat of a sister stamping her pretty little Jimmy Choo’d foot!

Stunned that Sasha could actually shout at her, Rorie lowered herself onto the sofa, flicking her long, blonde hair in disgust.

‘There’s no need to take that tone with me Sasha,’ she huffed. ‘I was only trying to help.’

‘I know you were,’ Sasha sighed. ‘But there’s things you don’t know. Maybe Mum doesn’t want to be found.’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘A man called William Morton came to see me. He was friends with Mum when she was a teenager. All that stuff about our grandmother being rich and disowning Mum is a load of rubbish. Our grandmother was an Irish prostitute who ran a brothel in Notting Hill.’

‘No, Jezebel Cole’s mother is a prostitute. You’re getting Mum muddled up with Jezebel Cole.’

‘Mum *is* Jezebel Cole. I’ve hired a private detective and we’ve been doing some digging around. Suki Millar? She was really called Susan Clapp and she was Mum’s best friend. The policeman who tells Colleen to make Jezebel a prostitute? He was really called Roger and he used to take a cut from Molly just so the brothel would stay open.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me you were doing all this?’

‘Because I knew you would hijack it like you hijack everything Rorie. William reckons Mum kept diaries as a young girl. I want to see those diaries because I think in there we might just find the clue to where she is.’

‘Why?’

‘Well, apparently she had a crush on this William and wrote a book called Two Hearts for him. It was about a young girl from the wrong side of the tracks who falls in love with an officer in World War One.’

‘But that’s the book she just published.’

‘Exactly. She wrote it when she was fifteen. She gave it to William, then disappeared on her sixteenth birthday. Can’t you see the similarity? She re-wrote it, published it and then disappeared again. I’ve flicked through the original manuscript and I can’t see any reason why she did it, but maybe the diaries she kept around then will give us some idea.’

‘Well I still think it’s a publicity stunt. But if you want to waste money on a private detective, it’s up to you. I’m going to Ireland.’

‘You’re still going?’

‘Yes. Some man reckons he saw our mother. I think that’s a little more tenable than your conspiracy theories about diaries and books and things.’

She got up and flounced out the room. Sasha went to follow her but she didn’t have the energy. Let Rorie do some of the work for a change. If she went to Ireland and found their mother, well let her have the glory. At least it would all be over with.

From her jeans pocket she took out her mobile, and the piece of paper with Susan Clapp’s address and number on it. It said she lived at number Flat A 33 George Street, Brighton. The number was a landline, not a mobile and this surprised Sasha somewhat. Nearly everyone gave out their mobile numbers these days. She dialled it, wondering what sort of premises these were. From what she’d heard of Susan Clapp, it was probably a squat.

‘Hello?’ a very posh female voice said at the other end and Sasha thought she’d got the wrong number.

‘Oh hello. Is Susan Clapp there please?’

‘Yes one moment. Who’s calling?’

‘I-It’s Patsy’s daughter.’

‘Okay, hold on.’

Sasha certainly hadn’t been expecting someone so well spoken to pick up the phone and wondered if Edna and Shannon had got the wrong end of the stick and Susan wasn’t living as a lesbian. Perhaps she worked for this Rosemarie as a cleaner or housekeeper or something.

The phone was picked up and a very nervous voice whispered;

‘Hello?’

‘Hello? Is that Susan?’

‘Yes it is.’

‘My name’s Sasha Fletcher. I’m Patty Belleville’s daughter. You would have known her as Patsy.’

‘Have they found her?’

‘Not yet, no. I’ve been talking to people Susan, and I get the feeling that my mother’s disappearance is down to something that happened in the past. I was visited by William Morton. Do you remember him?’

‘Yeah, course I do. We all hung around together as kids.’

‘He gave me the original version of Two Hearts. Apparently Mum disappeared after she wrote it, like she’s disappeared now. But your mum tells me she went to live in a flat in Battersea.’

‘That’s right. On Belleville Road. That’s where she got her writing name from I guess. Look, I’d love to chat Sasha, but Rose and I are going away for a few days. Why don’t you come down and see me when I get back? I’ll be at work, but we can have a coffee or something.’

‘That sounds good. Where do you work?’

‘At Rose’s Garden Centre. Do you want the address?’

‘Yes please.’ Sasha grabbed a pen from the coffee table and wrote on the paper with the other address on.

‘Okay, it’s Rose’s Garden Centre, Brighton Road, it’s on the A259. Anytime on Thursday would be fine.’

‘Thank you Susan, thank you so much.’

Sasha hung up and sat staring at the phone in shock. She hadn’t expected Susan to be articulate and friendly. She’d been expecting a surly chav like her daughter. Maybe she’d done better for herself as well. Then again, if this sighting was right, she might not need to visit Susan. Rorie might have brought Patty back from Ireland by then.

CHAPTER TEN

Summer 1971

It was a beautiful day. The sun had been shining like this for weeks on end and suddenly the little back yard behind five Talbot Road had become a haven. Patsy loved sunbathing. She would tan really easily, and within days would be almost black. The heat made her hair go more frizzy, but she just put more oil on it. The weather was so wonderful, nothing worried her.

Claudine was here and playing her reggae albums in the lounge room. The laid back music suited the atmosphere and Patsy didn't think life could get much better.

Lying back in the deckchair, her face turned up to the sun, she reflected on the conversation she'd had with Mr Rigby earlier on. After he'd seen Judith, he'd hung around and chatted to Patsy in the garden. She'd decided to do History O'Level and the old man wanted to help her all he could. He told her about his father who fought in the First World War and died at the battle of the Somme - just two weeks after he'd married his childhood sweetheart. Apparently she'd been the daughter of the woman his mother was a maid for, and their friendship was looked down upon by everyone around them. They fell in love and she defied her parents by becoming a nurse in France, tending to the soldiers. They married and then he died two months afterwards. Shortly afterwards she discovered she was pregnant for Mr Rigby and brought him up alone.

It was such a romantic story and made Patsy think of her and William. He was now planning on going travelling next year when he finished his A'levels, and was talking of going to India and Japan and other far-off places. What Patsy hadn't told him was that all the money she got from 'sleeping with' Paul, was being stashed away so she could join him. As soon as she finished her O'levels, she was determined to leave home and travel the world with her friend; then when she came back she would get a job and move out of the brothel once and for all.

Life wasn't too bad these days. Roger still controlled things with a rod of iron; but he left her alone now she was seeing to Paul. What Roger didn't realise was that when the two youngsters met each week, all they did was sit in her room and chat. Paul was seeing a probation officer called Ted, and their relationship was conducted in the strictest secrecy. Patsy was his only confidant and she enjoyed their chats. Sometimes he would bring a bottle of vodka and some lemonade and they'd get drunk. It was like having a private party. Patsy told him all about her feelings for William and her travelling plans, and she hoped they could stay friends forever.

She wasn't expected to sleep with anyone else and had no intention to. That fumble she'd had with Paul before his confession hardly amounted to anything, and she still considered herself a virgin. She intended to stay that way too until she could make William change his mind.

The front door bell rang and she left it to Claudine or one of the other girls to answer - she was far too comfortable basking in the sun like a contented cat. She had another four weeks of this to look forward to, before heading back to school for her final year. This made her thoughts turn to Jimmy Lee. He was in the Scrubs at the moment, awaiting trial for beating that boy up. If he was found guilty, he would have to serve at least two years in Borstal. Patsy wondered what would have happened if they'd gone out together. How would he have felt about her arrangement with Paul? Not many boyfriends would be happy about it.

She was awoken by the sound of voices and suddenly a dark cloud passed before her eyes. Opening them, she saw William standing there with a soppy smile upon his face, but before she could speak, she realised he was with someone; a tiny blonde girl swamped in a maxi dress, standing next to him, holding onto his hand. The girl was very pretty and looked posh, and suited William so well. It took all Patsy's strength not to sob out loud

'Pats I want you to be the first person to meet Jenny,' William said eagerly. 'Jenny, this is my best friend Patsy.'

'It's lovely to meet you Patsy,' the girl replied in a cut glass accent. 'William adores you.'

'Y-You never said you had a girlfriend,' Patsy uttered.

'Jen and I went out together back when I was in Dorset. She's come here to study at Imperial College and we hooked back up.'

Patsy was winded. It was as though a hundred weight had come swinging from the sky and pounded into her stomach. William had never mentioned a girlfriend. He never said anything about this Jenny coming back to him.

'We were wondering if you wanted to come to Holland Park with us,' William said.

'I can't,' she snapped. 'I don't feel very well. I've got a headache.'

'Well sitting out in the sun isn't going to help you is it?' Jenny laughed.

'Don't tell me what to do,' Patsy cried, getting up with such force the deckchair fell over. 'It's none of your business.'

She turned and ran into the house, the contrast from the sun to indoors was so strong that she could barely see anything. She ran up the five flights of stairs to her bedroom and threw herself upon the bed, sobbing. For the first time in her young life, she knew what heartbreak felt like. The pain of rejection ripped her in two. She'd always known it would be a struggle to convince William's parents to accept her as his girlfriend, but she always thought with a little persuasion and charm she could do it. If she left the brothel and got a respectable job and a flat, maybe they'd forget she was Molly Keegan's daughter and welcome her with open arms.

But Rachel and Gordon weren't the problem. It was William himself. All the while he'd been with Patsy, he'd been thinking of blonde, pert, pretty, posh little Jenny, with her English rose complexion and perfect accent. When Patsy heard the street door slam, she hoped William had sent Jenny on her way and would come up to see if she was okay. If he did, she would throw caution to the wind and tell him that she loved him - anything to make him change his mind.

She listened for his footsteps, but the only sound she could hear was the faint beat of Claudine's records. William had gone as well. Patsy began to sob again, wishing she was dead. Wishing she hadn't been born in a brothel. Wishing she was white. Who was ever going to love her when she was like this? The black girls at school never spoke to her. Not so much because she was half-caste, more because their church-going mothers would never approve of their offspring mixing with a girl who lived in a brothel. The white girls just called her nigger and spat at her.

Her tears subsiding a little, Patsy lay staring at the cracked ceiling, making decisions about her future. She had to get out of the brothel. She had to leave Molly and go and live somewhere else. She couldn't do it until she was sixteen next year, but as soon as her birthday came, she would be off. Perhaps she could go and live somewhere else and pass herself off as Spanish or Middle Eastern. People would be more accepting of her if they thought she was actually from somewhere rather than just a half-breed.

The front door bell rang once more and she wondered if it was William come back. Perhaps his guilty conscience had got the better of him and he was going to beg her for forgiveness - promising his undying love.

She left the room, tidying her hair as she went, hoping her eyes didn't look too puffy.

'You gonna get that front door darlin'?' Claudine called in her thick Jamaican accent.

'Sure am.'

With a skip in her step, Patsy opened the door, expecting it to be William, and was rather shocked to find it was a stranger. He was young and dressed in jeans that were splattered with paint. He was very good looking, with dark hair and dark eyes, and as he lent against the door frame, Patsy could see his fingers were also splattered with paint too. He was obviously a decorator.

'Have I come to right house love?' he asked in a strong Dublin accent. Patsy recognised it because it sounded like her mother.

'Right house for what?' she asked.

He stepped in and pushed himself close to her, chewing his gum and surveying her with hungry eyes. To Patsy's alarm, she felt herself flush with desire.

'Well you'll do, gorgeous,' he smiled.

She hesitated for a moment. It wasn't meant to be like this. Her first proper time was supposed to be with William. But he didn't want to know her. He'd made her feel like the worthless piece of trash people had always told her she was. Well maybe by being a worthless piece of trash, she could earn enough money to get away. And this guy was gorgeous.

'It's two pounds,' she said, suddenly feeling as though she was playing a role. This wasn't Patsy Keegan doing business. This was Jessica Cole.

'Cheap at 'alf the price,' he laughed. 'Show me the way.'

By the time Molly returned from shopping, Liam (as Patsy discovered his name was) had gone and she was two pounds richer. Somehow Patsy couldn't face her mother and decided to spend the rest of the day in her room, claiming she had a headache. She opened the window, trying to get rid of the smell of sweat and tobacco. She took her diary from under her mattress and started to write, feeling the need to confess to someone.

Monday 2nd August 1971

So Jessica had finally done it. She had finally become a whore, just like her mother. This time had been a lot different to that first time with P. L had been bursting at the seams and couldn't wait to get his hands on her. Jessica wasn't quite sure why she'd enjoyed it so much. Was it because of the money? Was it because L was good looking and charming and made her laugh? Or was it because as she laid there, the body she'd been saving for W, being mauled by this rough Irish boy, it felt like she was sticking two fingers up at W? Looking at J, she bet W never got anything more than a kiss from her – girls like her always held out until they had an engagement ring on their finger at the least! Jessica was a proper woman now, having sex with men who wanted her. She wondered if she should speak to her mother about it. M would probably fight it, tell Jessica she was too young and to stick to P. Perhaps she would wait until R came round and ask her mother in front of him. She wasn't likely to refuse with R here. Just another year of this and Jessica could get away forever.

She stopped writing and thought about the plans she'd been making - travelling around the world with William, coming back and finding a job and a new home. Now that wasn't going to happen, because he had Jenny and even if she didn't want to go with him, she would never agree to him going away with another girl.

The brazenness of Jessica started to ebb away and Patsy re-emerged. She felt suddenly naked, sitting there in just her dress, no bra or knickers underneath. Her mouth was sore from Liam's stubble and she ached between the legs. This was what she had become. A prostitute. All those years the girls at school had teased her, accused her of being like her mother, and it was never true, but now it was. She hated Molly. Hated her for bringing her into this horrible environment. If she'd done the decent thing and given her away at birth, she'd have probably been adopted by a nice, normal family, and she could have been the one going out with William. The Mortons were decent people; they wouldn't have objected to her colour had she come from a family the same class as them.

She thought about Mr Rigby and the story he'd told her about his parents. It may have all happened nearly sixty years ago but nothing had changed. Like his dad, she had come from the wrong side of the tracks, but at least his father had a happy ending, marrying the girl he loved – even if it was for a brief time. He may have died on the bloody battlefields of the Somme, but at least for a few months he knew the meaning of true happiness.

Something gripped Patsy. If she couldn't have a real happy ending, she'd invent her own. She'd write about Mr Rigby's parents, but change it around. It would be a rich boy and a poor girl. The boy would be based on William, and the girl, her. In her head, and on paper, she could create the world she wanted to live in; make anything she wanted to happen - just as she had as a child, writing all those Jessica Cole books.

Getting out of bed, she went over to her wardrobe, where she'd stuffed her schoolbag for the summer. She got her English folder out, ripping out the blank pieces of paper at the back and returned to bed. Leaning upon the diary that contained all her sordid secrets, she began to create her perfect world.

Two Hearts by Patricia Keegan

Walter sat under the scorching sun, the first hot day they'd had for ages. The mud had started to dry and the air was filled with the stench of dirt and dead men's blood. The trench was eerily quiet, just like a Sunday morning back home in London. But instead of his parents reading the newspapers, he was surrounded by young men like himself, writing to their sweethearts or having a quiet smoke and reflecting on the hell all around them. He took his notepad from his kit bag and settled down to write, hoping the Hun wouldn't launch some sort of surprise attack as he sat telling of his adventures to his beloved Pauline.....

CHAPTER ELEVEN

By the time Thursday arrived, Sasha's nerves were at breaking point. Rorie had just returned from Ireland and spent Wednesday evening round at Patty's, sulking and pouting because she'd wasted almost a week going from coast to coast with no sighting of their mother. The petrol station where the farmer claimed to have seen her didn't have CCTV, so the Garda couldn't help. Rorie had a way of complaining that made Sasha feel she blamed her for the whole thing, and in the end she told her sister to go home and leave the detective work to her.

As well as this, she fretted about going to Seth's party the following evening. She couldn't deny there had been an attraction between them, and this scared Sasha. She was so out of practice with the opposite sex and she was frightened of making an idiot of herself. She wanted to back out but it was too late; she'd told Dana about it and her baby sister was determined to go.

Then there was the biggie. Today she would be meeting with Susan Clapp, her mother's closest childhood friend. Susan might be able to shed some light on why Patty ran away and how much of the Tale of Jezebel Cole was true. Sasha felt nervous at the thought of hearing the truth about her mother. What if it was so horrific she started to feel sorry for her? If she allowed herself to think of her mother as an innocent little girl, corrupted by those around her, then it meant she would have to re-evaluate everything she'd ever felt about her. It was easy to write her off as a selfish bitch and have no sympathy for her, but if she'd been an abused child, it would explain away a lot of her actions, and make Sasha look at her differently.

She picked Phillipa up at Sloane Square Station and drove to Brighton herself, as she didn't feel it fair to make Phillipa drive such a long way. As always, Phillipa was punctual and waiting for her outside the station, looking like an over-grown teenager in her skinny jeans and nautical, striped t-shirt. She seemed almost excited at the prospect of a day out in Brighton and Sasha envied her youthful exuberance.

'How did Rorie get on in Ireland?' she asked as she got into Sasha's car.

'It was a wasted journey. There was no CCTV in the camera at the petrol station, and the Garda couldn't help at all. Rorie spent most of her time taking full advantage of the luxury treatments in the hotel and driving round to look for Mum. That was it.'

'Well I've made a little progress.'

She lifted her rucksack onto her lap and pulled out her note pad.

'I've a contact in the Met who gets information for me. All illegal of course but needs must. In 1972 there was an investigation conducted upon Superintendent Roger Chandler of Notting Hill Police. He was accused of living off immoral earnings and taking cuts off various brothels and prostitutes operating on their own. This was around the time the clear up operations started in the Met. It wasn't unusual back then for officers to take a bung; but when the clear up started, people like him were the first to go. As you can imagine, he wasn't put away; he was retired early and sent off to live in Spain. I've no idea what happened to him after that.'

'Was there any mention of my grandmother?'

‘Yes, a Molly Keegan was definitely found guilty of living off immoral earnings at Hammersmith Magistrates in September 1972. She was sentenced to three years and sent to Holloway.’

‘And any mention of her after that?’

‘Nothing I’m afraid. But it looks as though your suspicions could be right; maybe Patty was involved in prostitution under the direction of this Roger guy.’

‘Do you think he could be blackmailing her or something?’

‘It’s a possibility, but it all happened a long time ago, so I don’t see why he would start now.’

Two hours later and they were in Brighton. Sasha was shaking so much that she couldn’t grip the wheel properly. That photo Edna Clapp showed her had been the first time Sasha had ever seen her mother as a child, and if she really allowed herself to think about it, the thought of that innocent little girl being made to prostitute herself was horrible. No wonder she turned into a bitch, it was probably the only way she could protect herself.

Rose’s Garden Centre was a big, pleasant looking place a few minutes from Brighton Town Centre. Sasha parked the car and had to take a few deep breaths before getting out.

‘Are you okay?’ Phillipa asked. ‘You don’t have to go through with this.’

‘I do. I need to find out more about my mother.’

‘Come on then,’ she smiled softly, laying her hand upon Sasha’s. ‘Let’s get it over with.’

Outside the shop was a huge garden area filled with plants of many colours and types. Phillipa immediately became distracted by a huge begonia she claimed her mother would love. Sasha focused on the woman who was watering a selection of rose bushes. She didn’t even know what it was about this small, middle aged woman with cropped silver hair, dressed in a plain white sweatshirt and jeans; but a sixth sense told her it was Susan. And when she stood up and turned around, her left sleeve hanging loose as she had no arm, Sasha knew she’d found the right person.

‘Susan?’ she asked quietly.

‘Yes love?’ the woman replied, her voice more gravelled than it had been on the phone.

‘I’m Sasha. Patty..... Patsy’s daughter.’

A smile broke out over Susan’s impish, lined face and she put her watering can down, rushing forward.

‘Sasha,’ she gasped, taking her hand and shaking it. ‘My God, look at you. You’re a big girl. Makes me realise how long it’s been since I last saw Patsy.’

‘Have I come at an inconvenient time?’

‘Not at all. Rose is on the till, so we can have a cup of coffee out the back, come on.’

‘Thanks. This is Phillipa by the way,’ Sasha said, indicating to Phillipa, who was still studying the begonia. ‘She’s been helping me find Mum.’

‘That really is a beautiful begonia Susan,’ Phillipa said. ‘How much is it?’

‘It’s a tenner, but seeing as you’re a friend of Sasha’s you can have it on the house.’

‘I couldn’t, possibly.’

‘Course you could. Go and put it in your car and meet us in the kitchen out the back.’

Susan strode off and Sasha followed. They walked into the shop and past a till where a far more femme looking woman of a similar age was working. Susan explained that she was going to the kitchen to chat to Sasha, and the woman nodded knowingly. Obviously she had previously been filled in on everything that had happened.

The kitchen area was small and cosy. On one of the worktops was a line of pot plants with names like ‘Mrs Ingleby’ or ‘Mr Southwood’ written on them and Sasha presumed they were reserved for customers. Susan told her to take a seat at the small table in the corner, and asked how she took her coffee. Sasha told her, then watched her, impressed at how deftly she dealt with everything, despite only having one arm. Just like Suki Millar.

‘This is a lovely garden centre,’ she said. ‘Have you worked here long?’

‘Just over three years,’ Susan replied, spooning coffee into three mugs. ‘How does your mate take coffee love?’

‘Milk, no sugar.’

‘Okay. Yeah, Rose opened the place three years ago. When her and me got together, she had to give up her job, so she chose to do this instead.’

‘What was her previous job?’

‘Drugs counsellor. She worked for the local NHS, so broke the rules a bit getting with me.’

‘You were a patient?’

‘I was. She was the woman who finally got me off heroin.’

‘Well you look like you have a lovely life now.’

‘Can’t complain.’

Phillipa joined them, wiping soil onto her jeans, a sheepish expression her face.

‘The, er, pot sort of toppled over a bit in the boot,’ she said. ‘Sorry.’

‘Well you can pay to have my boot cleaned,’ Sasha said before breaking into laughter. ‘Don’t worry about it. Sit down.’

Phillipa joined her and Susan brought over the three cups of coffee, sitting with them at the tiny table. Sasha looked out the window, watching the people wandering around the gardens. This was such a middle-class, genteel world. So far away from the high-rise horror of Edna Clapp and her grand-daughter Shannon.

‘I heard there was a sighting of Patsy in Ireland,’ Susan said, sipping her steaming hot drink. ‘Is that right?’

‘No. My sister went over to check it out, but the Garda couldn’t help her.’

‘She might have had more plastic surgery. So people wouldn’t recognise her anyway.’

‘More plastic surgery? My mother never had plastic surgery. Only botox.’

‘Well she had something darlin’. Cos as soon as I saw her when she started getting famous, I realised it was her, but her looks had changed. Mainly the nose. Your mum used to have a wide, West Indian nose. Next time I saw her, she had a little dainty thing. I’d say she had something done to her chin too, it looks narrower. She used to have a little round face.’

‘This is so weird. Mum was twenty when she had me and she’s always looked like she does now. So you’re saying she had plastic surgery before I was born?’

‘She must have done. But I couldn’t see Jimmy agreeing to that.’

‘Jimmy?’

‘Jimmy Lee. Your dad.’

Those four words rocked Sasha to the very core. She literally felt the room spin, her chair tip and her legs give way. For the first time in thirty-three years she had a name for her father. Jimmy Lee. Patty had never mentioned this name before. How could she never even speak his name when he had helped to give Sasha life?

‘Are you alright love?’ Susan asked. ‘You’ve gone as white as a sheet.’

‘Sasha didn’t know who her father was Susan,’ Phillipa explained. ‘I think it’s come as a bit of a shock.’

‘I didn’t realise love, I thought Patsy would have told you.’

‘All my mum ever told me was that my dad was a bad man who beat her up, and she ended up in a woman’s refuge. Jimmy Lee? Who was he? Was he a customer?’

‘Customer? No. Nothing like that. We all went to school together. Jimmy was in the year above us. He was gorgeous, looked like a young John Travolta. But he was a vicious bastard. Once he slapped this girl right across the face because she was teasing Patsy. Then the day he left school, he was arrested for nearly killing this kid. He got two years in prison for it. Him and Patsy got together in 1974 and Patsy moved in with him later that year. That was when I got into drugs. I couldn’t live without her.’

‘Were you in a relationship with her?’ Phillipa asked.

‘Chance would have been a fine thing,’ Susan laughed. ‘Patsy was strictly a man’s woman, but it was her who first made me realise I had feelings towards girls. I adored her. Of course, I couldn’t come out back then. When you’ve got a mother like Edna Clapp who’s had more pricks than a pin cushion, you can’t exactly admit to being a dyke. All that the other year about Patsy and Abigail Burns? Publicity stunt. Your mother was never a lesbian.’

‘I know that. This Jimmy Lee, where is he?’

‘At Her Majesty’s Pleasure I’m afraid Sasha. He got done for murder in 1977.’

‘But he would be out by now.’

‘I think the judge thought he was a dangerous psychopath and gave him an indefinite sentence. Sorry you’ve had to find that out.’

‘I’m just so shocked. I didn’t know who my father was. It just sounds weird to hear his name.’

‘Well, there is a chance he isn’t your dad. But your mum was besotted with the bastard. I can’t see her sleeping with anyone else.’

‘She was in love with him?’

‘Well for the fact she ain’t settled with anyone else for long since then, I guess Jimmy was the love of her life.’

‘I thought William Morton was the love of her life.’

‘William? No not William. She had a crush on William. Silly cow started prostituting herself because of him.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘It’s hard to explain, but Patsy always wanted to be someone else. She used to write these stories about this girl called Jessica Cole.’

‘Jessica Cole?’ interrupted Phillipa.

‘Exactly. Jessica Cole was this blonde haired, blue eyed posh girl who went to boarding school and lived a charmed life. I think when she met William, she saw him as a male version of what she wanted to be. So she got it into her head that if she went out with him, some of his magic would rub off and she’d become Jessica Cole. Well, old Molly used to be in the pocket of this dodgy copper and he made her agree to Patsy sleeping with this young copper called Paul. Apparently he was gay and they only did it the once; the rest of the time they just chatted and pretended to have had sex. Then one day William brings home this girlfriend – Jenny her name was. She really was Jessica Cole personified, so Patsy was devastated. She got her own back by sleeping with customers who came to the house while Molly was out.’

‘So Mum was a prostitute?’

‘We both were darling. The young copper she was seeing warned her that the police were investigating his boss *and* the brothel and a raid was imminent. He told her about his aunt in Battersea who let out rooms and could put her up. So she left.’

‘Did Molly know where she’d gone?’

‘No. She didn’t even warn her mother they were going to be raided. Patsy had started to become a hard little cow by then. I think it was a combination of William rejecting her and then turning to the game. She went to Battersea and got a job as a waitress in a café on Northcote Road. She was doing that when I moved in with her. Edna got arrested for handling stolen goods in 1972 and the younger kids were put into care, but I moved in with Patsy. I went to work with her at the café, but we were a couple of sixteen year olds and it was so boring. We got talking to this woman who lived in the flat next door to ours. She was a high-class hooker and persuaded us to give it a go. I never thought a bloke would want to sleep with me. Like this.’ She raised her stump. ‘But some blokes have a fetish for amputees and stuff.’

‘So Mum was working as a prostitute all that time?’

‘She was. Then one day we went to the fun fair in Battersea Park and who should we run into? Jimmy Lee. He was still gorgeous, but even I could tell prison had changed him - made him even harder. That didn’t put Patsy off. She started seeing him and within three weeks she’d packed the game in and moved out of our flat into his place in Hammersmith. I never saw her again. Well, not as a friend. Just on the telly and on book covers.’

‘I’m completely baffled,’ Sasha uttered. ‘William Morton came to me with the original copy of Two Hearts, convinced there was some link between Mum writing that back in 1972 and then disappearing, then writing it again last year and disappearing. But it seems it’s just a coincidence.’

‘I would say it was. She never mentioned William again once we’d moved away from Talbot Road. While she was waitressing she was seeing this actor who lived in Clapham, and she had her head turned by him. Then she was too busy being wine and dined by rich clients when she was on the game. Then when she met Jimmy again, that was it.’

‘So would you say this Jimmy was capable of beating Patsy?’ Phillipa asked. ‘Like she claimed?’

‘Without a doubt. Like I said, he was a vicious little bastard. It was a woman he murdered and got put away for.’

‘A woman?’

‘Um. A prostitute would you believe? He caved her head in with a brick.’

‘What happened to you Susan? After Patsy left?’

‘Well I developed a very healthy heroin addiction. I kept whoring myself, then I met Ray. He was also an addict. I got pregnant for Shannon and I tried to look after her, but I wasn’t able. I didn’t have a maternal bone in my body, and all my concern went to myself and trying to get my next fix, so I gave her over to Mum to look after.’

‘That must have been very difficult.’

‘I knew she was better off. Edna might have been a thief and a bit of a slapper, but at least she wasn’t a drug addict. It took me a long time to get clean; but with Rose’s love and support, I’ll never touch smack again.’

‘Do you know what happened to Mum’s diaries?’ Sasha asked. ‘William’s convinced she kept a diary that might tell me more. Her agent hasn’t got them, and they’re nowhere in her house.’

‘I’ve got them darling.’

‘You’ve got them?’

‘When she moved in with Jimmy she reckoned she wanted to leave that old life behind and so gave me the box with all her diaries and manuscripts in. When I got clean, I decided to get my act together and clear out all my junk, and when I found her old box I tried to get rid of it. I contacted her agent, but he told me that he didn’t know who I was talking about and to go away.’

‘Mum must have told him to say that because he knew darn well what her real name was, because my maiden name was Keegan – her real surname.’

‘Well, whatever the reasons, I’ve got the diaries. Would you like to take them?’

‘I’d love to.’

‘Alright. Well I’ve got to get back to work, but why don’t you drop by our house at about six o’clock and pick them up? You’ve got our address haven’t you?’

‘Yes, thirty three George Street.’

‘Flat A.’

‘Do you have any idea what happened to my grandmother?’

‘Molly? No. She never came back to Talbot Road. If she had, Edna would have told me. She probably went off and started another brothel. It was all that Molly knew.’

‘I know it’s years since you saw Patty, but do you have any idea where she might have gone now?’

‘I don’t know Sasha love. It could even be a publicity stunt.’

‘That’s what my sister thinks.’

‘The Patsy I knew wouldn’t do something so cruel, but she started to change even before she left Talbot Road. Maybe you’ll find out more from her diaries.’

Phillipa drove Sasha back to Brighton. Sasha was still shaking, rocked by all the revelations that had been presented to her. She suddenly had a father - albeit one in prison and considered a psychopath, but a father all the same. Jimmy Lee. She tried to picture a young John Travolta, sexy and smouldering in *Grease*. To hear that this man had been the love of Patty’s life made

Sasha feel even more confused. She had been convincing herself that William had been the one, and that Patty resented whoever Sasha's father was, because he wasn't the person she loved. Now it turned out her first daughter *was* by the man she loved - so why had she always been so cold towards her?

'I can find out more about your father if you like,' Phillipa said, as if reading Sasha's thoughts. 'It shouldn't be too difficult.'

'Can you imagine if it got out? That my dad's a psychopath? Luca would refuse to give me a penny of the divorce settlement.'

'I think seeing as Luca left you for a twenty year old bimbo, after getting her pregnant, he's got no right to criticise you for something you've no control over.'

'Even so. It's horrible. Rorie's dad's a heart-throb actor; even Dana's dad's just a harmless himbo. My old man's a murderer. It's terrible.'

'Look, why don't we find an internet café somewhere? There are loads of sites with archived newspaper stories. It might not be as bad as you think.'

'And her diaries will stop at where she went to live with my father. I won't know what happened between the time of her moving in with him and leaving him. And why did she change her appearance?'

'Maybe she was scared of him. Perhaps she was in witness protection or something.'

'I don't think they would have paid for plastic surgery back then would they? You know more about the police than I do, they would have probably just seen her as a silly girl who got everything she deserved.'

'You're probably right. It is very strange, I have to say. Let's find out more about your dad and perhaps we can go from there.'

They went back to Brighton and had lunch in a pub. Sasha knew she was terrible company, barely able to speak, so Phillipa spent most her time on her Blackberry. Sasha wondered if she should tell Rorie and Dana about what she'd discovered. Rorie would go apoplectic at the thought of her mother being touched by some sort of psychopath, and would be terrified that it might somehow damage her career. Maybe it would be best to keep quiet for now.

After lunch they found an Internet café, and the two women sat together while Phillipa searched various news engines, trying to find archived stories.

'There are so many weirdoes out there who are fascinated by serial killers and things like that,' she explained. 'So there are thousands of websites dedicated to murderers.'

She found information on Jimmy Lee relatively quickly. After searching 'prostitute murder' '1977' and 'Jimmy Lee'. Several articles came up.

'Look I'm going off for a wander round the Lanes,' she said, standing up, realising Sasha would want to be alone for this. 'I'll come back in an hour or so. Is that okay?'

‘That’s fine,’ Sasha smiled. ‘Thanks for everything Phillipa.’

The waitress fetched Sasha another cup of coffee and once she was gone, she took a deep breath and got on with finding out about her father. The first search result on Google was entitled ‘*The Handsome Monster of Hammersmith*’, the words following it ‘*Janie Gilbert, brick, psychopath*’. Sasha clicked on it and found indeed it was a website dedicated to notorious killers. The author of this particular piece was called Dwight S Savino, and Sasha imagined some loner in his bedroom in the middle of Ohio, compiling stories about killers and getting off on it at the same time. Even so, at least it was something about her father, and when she scrolled down, she was met with an image of him, and to her embarrassment, the shock of it made her vomit a little into her mouth.

It was true that Jimmy Lee was handsome. He did look like John Travolta, even down to the swept back black hair. What horrified Sasha was that he had exactly the same shape jaw as her – well defined with a dimple in the middle. She had her murdering father’s jaw. Tearing her eyes away from the snapshot of the smiling, good looking young man, she concentrated on the yellow words shining out brightly from the black background.

The Handsome Monster of Hammersmith

For hooker Janie Gilbert it was just another night at work. The twenty-two year old had moved to London from Birmingham just six months before to become an actress, and like a lot of young girls in that position, got lured into prostitution. What she hadn’t anticipated on that the night of December 17th 1976 was that she would meet with an angry young man with a hatred of prostitutes.

Jimmy Lee was handsome and popular. Growing up in the suburb of Hammersmith, he became a trouble maker at an early age, running with gangs and getting into fights. At sixteen he tried to kill another boy and was sentenced to two years in Borstal – a prison for young men. On release he tried to go straight, but the lure of violence was strong. His neighbors reported him to the police on numerous occasions for attacking his live-in girlfriend, but in the 1970s, domestic abuse wasn’t taken seriously. When his girlfriend moved out, he became a heavy drinker and soon became determined to take his revenge on the woman who’d left him.

A dark, winter’s night, it was easy for Lee to hide in the shadows while Janie took a cigarette break near a piece of wasteland in Shepherds Bush. He pounced upon her and the powerless girl was unable to fend him off. He caved her head in with a brick. Angus Mitchell, the police officer leading the case said it was the most horrific attack he had ever seen.

Lee was arrested after his new girlfriend – a 17 year old who was terrified of him, reported him when he came home covered in blood. He was tried at the Old Bailey in the summer of 1977. His defence was that he thought the victim was his old girlfriend, and he had been driven by jealousy and anger. He was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. Lee continues to be a danger to the public – three years into his sentence he kidnapped and tortured a prison officer, holding him in his cell for five days. Lee is unlikely to ever be released.

Sasha scrolled down the page, where there was a photograph of Janie Gilbert, the victim. She was a pretty, petite mixed race girl. Indeed a dead ringer for Patty.

Closing the page, she opened the next one and saw it was a copy of the West London Herald dated Wednesday 27th July 1977;

Local Man Jailed for Murder of Prostitute

A man was yesterday found guilty of the murder of prostitute Janie Gilbert in December last year. Jimmy Lee 22, of Hatchett House, the Priory Estate, Hammersmith claimed to have mistaken Janie 22 for his ex-girlfriend when he caved her head in with a brick, on a piece of wasteland close to White City. Detective Chief Inspector Angus Mitchell, who led the investigation claimed Janie's injuries were the worst he'd ever seen. Janie had been in London for six months after leaving her home in Birmingham with hopes of an acting career. However she fell into prostitution, which led her to her death.

Lee, who is unemployed, is to be sentenced in two weeks time. It is expected he will receive a life sentence.

So it was official, Sasha's father was a monster who murdered an innocent girl thinking she was Patty. It seemed he must have assumed Patty had returned to the game when she left him. She now understood why her mother was so reluctant to tell her who her father was. In a rare act, Patty had been protecting her.

Phillipa returned bearing handfuls of tacky, antique jewellery – presents for her mother and Maisie. They ordered more coffee and Sasha told her what she had found. Even saying it, it didn't seem real.

'When I get back, I'll go to this Hatchett Close and ask around,' Phillipa said. 'There might be someone who remembers Patty and your father.'

'That sounds so weird.'

Phillipa reached out, laying her hand upon Sasha's.

'Do you want me to find out what prison he's in?'

'If you like. But I don't want to see him.'

'Well I don't blame you there, but it would do you good just to know where he is.'

They made their way to Susan's home. It was a respectable looking basement flat in a smart street, close to the Seafront. Sasha wondered if Patty had ever found out her oldest friend had moved into the middle-classes if she have wanted to suddenly know her again. Probably not. Susan knew too much about 'Patsy'.

Susan led them into the kitchen, a long room with French doors at the bottom that opened out onto a beautifully landscaped garden. She told the women to sit down and they did so, both declining her offer of coffee. They watched as she opened the cupboard just outside the kitchen door. It was filled with the usual crap, and she muttered to herself as she searched around inside it. Finally she pulled out a tatty looking dark red brief case. It was dusty and dilapidated and Sasha was amazed it managed to hold all her mother's diaries without breaking.

‘She bought this in a second hand shop on Falcon Road,’ Susan lamented, laying the briefcase on the pine table. ‘It’s supposed to be lockable, but it isn’t, just slip the catch.’

Sasha did as she was told and opened the case up, half expecting it to be like in films when a golden glow would shine from the hidden treasure. Instead all she was greeted with were a collection of exercise books and pieces of paper.

‘Have you read through any of these?’ she asked Susan.

‘No. I knew everything that happened to your mum. I didn’t need to read her diary.’

‘Well I guess this will be my bedtime reading for the next fortnight.’

CHAPTER TWELVE

Christmas 1974

Patsy couldn't imagine being any happier. Her surroundings might have only been a fairly cramped council flat, sixteen floors high, in the middle of Hammersmith. But for the first time in her life, she was enjoying a family Christmas. This time last year it had just been her and Susan, and with the money she'd made through prostituting herself, she'd paid for them to have Christmas dinner in the Marlborough Hotel, followed by an overnight stay. The two girls had made the most of the mini bar and watched the big, colour TV until they fell asleep. But there was still something so lonely about it. Patsy had even found herself longing for the old days back at the brothel when Molly would cook for those girls who didn't have family to go to, and they would all get drunk and sit around singing traditional Irish songs.

Today was a different kettle of fish altogether. A proper dinner with a proper family. There were so many Lees, they didn't all fit round the table and some had to sit on the sofa, balancing their plates on their laps. Their mum, Queenie Lee, held court at the end of the table, dishing out the turkey and veg; shouting at the littl'uns when they were too rowdy, and ordering her strapping sons to wait on the older members of the family.

Everyone in the local area knew Queenie. Her dad ran a fruit and veg stall in Shepherds Bush Market and she'd taken it over when he died. Her husband Bill claimed to be on the sick due to his back problems, but this didn't stop him propping up the bar of the Uxbridge Arms, or helping various local 'entrepreneurs' shift their stuff in the dead of night. They had three sons - Gary, Stephen and Jimmy. Gary had gone to technical college and now worked as a draughtsman for Surrey Council. He and his wife Bet looked down their noses at the rest of the family and even today, at Christmas, couldn't bring themselves to let their hair down and have a laugh. Bet chewed the turkey as though it was poisonous and Gary kept moaning at Warren and Keeley - Stephens kids, who were running about making noise.

Patsy liked Stephen a lot. He was good looking like Jimmy, but being five years older, exuded more confidence. He obviously adored Nancy, his wife, and the two children but still had that flirtatious glint in his eye when he spoke. Patsy found herself having a laugh with him, but was a little disconcerted when she looked up to find Jimmy sitting opposite them, arms crossed, sulking.

She wanted to assure him he had nothing to worry about. Yes his brother was good looking and charming, but it was him she loved. So much had changed since they'd met back up again. When her mother was sentenced to three years in prison for running a brothel and living off immoral earnings, Patsy didn't even go to the court. She blamed Molly for everything bad that had ever happened to her and never wanted to see her again; but when she moved to Battersea she'd been so lonely, crying herself to sleep every night, feeling exiled from everything and everyone she knew. Even a brief romance with an up and coming actor called Adam had done little to make her feel more settled.

She'd still think about William and would imagine him off on his travels, and she'd wince when she thought of their final meeting. He'd told her he'd split up with Jenny, and was

travelling alone. Like a fool she'd begged him to let her join him, and when he'd refused, she'd broken down and thrown Two Hearts at him. She'd written it for him and he didn't even care.

Things had picked up when Susan came to live with her, and when Candice, their next-door neighbour had suggested they tried high-class hooking, Patsy had done it without a thought. She'd spent the last year of her time at Talbot Road sleeping with customers behind Molly's back (she'd never found the courage to ask her mother to let her work) and at least it would be better money than the café, and she could choose what hours she worked.

It hadn't been that bad. She and Susan made a tidy amount of money between them and planned to rent a flat somewhere posh like Chelsea; then they'd give up prostitution, and get jobs in a clothes shop in Kensington High Street. The dream of this made having sex with overweight, middle-aged men almost bearable. Patsy still documented it all in her diary, writing as Jessica Cole so she could detach herself. Just like back that first time with Liam the Irish builder; she would play the part of the girl who whored herself. The real Patsy was the girl who'd go shopping or dancing at Hammersmith Palais with Susan.

Before the girls could get on with their plans, a trip to Battersea Fun Fair changed everything. Jimmy was there with a few of his mates, and just like that time at school, he broke away from them, taking Patsy off on her own. He suggested they went on the ghost ride, and by the time they came off it, they were snogging and he was begging her to go out with him. Within weeks he'd found them a home – a council flat he was subletting off a mate, in Hammersmith. Even though he didn't have a proper job and made his money by fencing stolen goods and other precarious activities; being with him made Patsy feel normal for the first time in her life, and she adored him for it. Determined to put her past behind her, she decided to give up the game and moved in with him. She'd even given Susan all her old diaries and Jessica Cole books, feeling they had nothing to do with her new life.

She never told Jimmy what she'd been doing before they met. She didn't pretend to be a virgin, but let him believe she'd had a couple of boyfriends and that was it. The irony being that the first time she ever slept with Jimmy was also the first time she'd regretted her past. She'd never shared her body with someone she loved before, and afterwards she cried, thinking of all those men who had used and abused her.

And here they were, in the heart of his rough family, with their Romany looks and loud voices. Patsy wanted to be like Queenie when she got older – a matriarch with a brood of children who worshipped her. That was why she had decided to come off the pill. She loved Jimmy so much and wanted his child. The council might even give them a place of their own if they were a proper family. She would smile when imagining her and Jimmy with their baby, taking it for walks and sharing its upbringing. She'd never known what it was like to have a dad around and she wanted different for her baby.

The evening wore on and the men went down the pub, including Jimmy. Patsy felt just a little bit disappointed that they weren't spending Christmas evening together, but she could see this was the way of the Lee family. The men went to the pub while the women stayed at home, drank cheap sherry and watched whatever film was on the TV. By eleven, Patsy was aching for her bed and told Queenie she was going home. Queenie was worried about her going out on her own, but she reassured her that it was only ten minutes away and she'd be fine.

And she was. It was when she walked into her own flat that she stepped into danger. She suddenly felt someone grip her hair and yank her head down. Once she got her bearings, she realised it was Jimmy, and couldn't for the life of her comprehend why he was doing this to her.

'Don't you ever flirt with my brother again, do you hear me?' he hissed. His breath stank of alcohol and it made Patsy feel sick.

'I-I wasn't,' she uttered. 'I was just chatting.'

To her horror, he started dragging her along by her hair, leading her into the front room, where he threw her onto the sofa. Patsy was convinced she was dreaming as he climbed on top of her, and sat across her narrow hips, pinning her down. Jimmy wasn't like this. He loved her and looked after her. Even his face looked different. His light blue eyes had become dark and fixed, spittle pooling at the sides of his mouth. He looked at her as though he hated her, and Patsy wondered what she could have done to upset him so much.

He lifted his fist up to punch her and instinctively, she put her hands up to protect herself. It wasn't enough, his mighty hand still managed to hammer into her left cheek and this was promptly followed by darkness.

She was awoken by the feeling of being shaken. For a moment she was a child again, back in the brothel; when sometimes Molly would run out of rooms and would her wake up and make her sleep on the sofa, so her bed could be used. Opening her eyes she was met with Jimmy's face – tears streaming down his cheeks.

'I'm so sorry Patsy,' he cried. 'I thought I'd killed you.'

It all came rushing back to her, and she winced as she felt the stinging pain in her left cheek. Jimmy had hit her. Jimmy who had always protected her, had hit her.

'It's okay,' she whispered, shocked to see him crying so much - he was normally so tough. He climbed off her and sat down, burying his face in his hands, sobbing.

'I was just so jealous,' he cried. 'I thought you liked Stephen more than me.'

He sounded so pitiful, so helpless, that Patsy soon forgot the pain in her cheek. Someone actually loved her so much that his jealousy had driven him to violence. No one had ever felt so strongly about her before.

She struggled to sit up, her hips hurting from where he'd sat upon her. She pulled him to her, laying his head upon her shoulder.

'I don't prefer Stephen to you. I love you,' she said, kissing his messy hair. 'If you only realised how much I love you.'

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Sasha wondered how on earth she was going to attend a party when so much was happening in her life. She had just discovered her father was a psychopath, and she'd received a phone-call this morning from Luca's solicitor requesting a meeting next week. Now she had to contend with all her mother's diaries. They certainly made fascinating reading. Up until Patty was fifteen she wrote them in the first person, then when she was attacked by a policeman at a party, the shock made her write them in the third person. She named herself Jessica Cole and the diary became more like a story.

At times they made horrific reading. Somehow that young girl who was forced into prostitution had nothing to do with Patty Belleville. Instead, she was just a scared child who wanted to keep her mother out of prison. The more Sasha read, the more she could see what Susan had meant. Patsy talked more about the things she did with William, and his beautiful house, than him himself. William epitomised everything Patsy wanted to be. And who could blame her when she led such a wretched life?

Sasha got as far as when the young police officer she was pretending to sleep with warned Patsy that the brothel was going to be raided, when she was interrupted by Dana bursting into Patty's office. She was wearing little more than a pink bra and knickers, with a string of rhinestones connecting the two, running down the middle of her little pot belly.

'What do you think?' she asked, doing a twirl.

'Where are your clothes?' Sasha replied.

'These are my clothes.'

'Dana you look like a Las Vegas showgirl. You're going to a party in the middle of London. At least put a mini skirt on.'

How could she tell her little sister that although she'd lost a couple of stone in recent weeks, she still had pockets of fat around her midriff? The press would rip her to pieces.

'Sasha, this is Rocky Sanchez's party. Have you seen him? He's gorgeous.'

'Seth said he was some sort of Big Brother drop out.'

'Yeah, he came third on Big Brother in 2006. But since then he's been seen at all the best parties and there's talk of him launching a new aftershave. He's got to notice me. So, how do I look?'

Sasha could only stare at her tubby little sister, with her backcombed hair and flabby body, and see their grandmother. Patsy went to great lengths to describe Molly as overweight and top heavy, with far too much frizzy hair. Suddenly it became apparent whom Dana took after. Worrying really, because Rorie was the spitting image of her father, and while Sasha looked like Patty, did that mean deep down she had it in her to do the same as Jimmy? Was evil born into people or was it learned?

'Are you okay?' Dana asked. 'You're as white as a sheet.'

‘I’m just tired that’s all. Why don’t you go to the party on your own? I’ll stay here.’

‘You’ll do no such thing. You never go out. Go and get your glad rags on.’

Sasha went to get up but her mobile started to ring. Fishing it out of her pocket she saw it was a number she didn’t recognise and wondered if it was her mother, just calling to say she was okay.

‘Hello?’ she said tentatively.

‘Sasha Fletcher?’ A loud, posh sounding female voice barked down the other end.

‘Yes.’

‘Hello, this is Natalie Edwards, I’m the Daily Crucible’s Lifestyle Editor.’

‘How did you get my number?’

‘It’s on your website.’

Sasha blushed, feeling stupid. She had a website, advertising her work and she’d put her mobile as a contact number. She berated herself for snapping.

‘What can I do for you?’

‘I was wondering if you’d be interested in doing an interview with us. I’ve got it on good authority that Luca and his new girlfriend are planning a ten-page spread in OK! very soon. I was wondering if you wanted to put your side of the story. You know, the divorce and the disappearance of your mother.’

Sasha couldn’t make a decision like that there and then. What if this Natalie asked too many questions and she ended up revealing things she wanted to keep hidden? But at the same time, if Luca and his tart were going to be flaunting themselves in the pages of a celebrity rag, why shouldn’t she make a bit of money by telling her side of the story?

‘Can I get back to you?’ she asked. ‘I’m just on my way out.’

‘No worries. I’ll text you my number. Give me a ring when you’ve thought about it.’

Sasha ended the call and put her phone back into her pocket. Dana looked at her, furrowing her brow.

‘Who was that?’

‘Some woman from the Daily Crucible. They want to do an interview with me about the marriage break-up and Mum’s disappearance. Apparently Luca and Melanie are going to be in OK! sometime soon.’

‘I hope you’re going to do it.’

‘I have to think about it. I’m not fame hungry like you Dan.’

‘No, but that little slapper Melanie obviously is. You’ve got to fight fire with fire.’

Sasha laughed at her baby sister’s enthusiasm, wishing some of it would rub off on her.

‘Okay, I’ll do the interview if you go and put a skirt on.’

‘It’s a deal. Now come on, we’ve got to choose something for you to wear.’

Sasha felt more nervous about seeing Seth than she’d anticipated. She told herself she was being silly; they’d met briefly the other day, and according to Phillipa, he’d flirted with her but she wasn’t aware of it. She couldn’t deny that she’d found him attractive, but she had now convinced herself he didn’t feel the same way. She also wondered what he’d think of her outfit. Dana had persuaded her to borrow one of her dresses. It was a black body con dress – in other words it just looked like black bandages wrapped around her body in order to create a slimmer silhouette. Not that Sasha needed it - she was whippet thin anyway. Dana had straightened her sister’s hair into the bob that the TV stylist had done the other week, and put rather too much make up on. Sasha had been almost too scared to look in the mirror when Dana had finished, and when she did, she hardly recognised the person who stared back. Dana kept raving about how sexy she looked and insisted she wear a pair of their mother’s shoes. Despite only being 5’3, Patty had remarkably big feet, and her size six black Louboutins fitted Sasha perfectly. She wasn’t used to tottering around on four-inch heels and was scared she was going to fall over

Dana had hired a limo to take them to Lexi’s, and Sasha felt ridiculous travelling in this ostentatious vehicle, observing the puzzled looks of passers by who thought there was someone famous in it. It got worse when they arrived, stepping out of the limo and onto the red carpet. Sasha hadn’t been expecting all this for a former Big Brother contestant. Behind the roped off area, paparazzi photographers were gathered and Sasha’s first instinct was to run away from them; but Dana gripped her hand and forced her into posing. Sasha tried not to blink as the lights popped, blinding her. Dana on the other hand posed like a professional, enjoying all the attention.

The bar looked a lot different to how it had when Sasha had come here the other day. The lighting was subdued and house music was playing loudly over the PA. A waiter stood by the door, holding a tray with glasses of champagne on. Dana took a couple of glasses, passed one to Sasha, and wiggled into the throng. Sasha recognised a few of the guests, but didn’t know their names. She’d never liked reality TV, but had sat through the occasional episode of *Big Brother* or *The X-Factor* with Kylie. The girls all looked like carbon copies of each other, with their fake tans, hair extensions and far too much make up. Dana immediately struck up a conversation with a pneumatic blonde who Sasha did not know, and she suddenly felt like a spare part, especially when Dana introduced her as Luca Fletcher’s wife rather than a person in their own right.

She looked around for Seth, and saw he was behind the bar; still wearing his shirt, tie and apron. She’d wondered if he would take it upon himself to schmooze with the guests; but he obviously preferred to stay behind the scenes, co-ordinating his staff. All the barmaids were as young and glamorous as the guests, and Sasha suddenly felt very old and frumpy, wondering what she was doing here. She could be back at home reading through her mother’s diary.

Swigging down her champagne, she made her way to the bar to order another drink. She felt herself blushing when she looked up to find instead of one of the painted dollies coming to take her order, it was Seth himself.

‘Thanks for coming,’ he smiled.

‘Dana would never have forgiven me if I hadn’t,’ she laughed. ‘I swear that girl would turn up to the opening of an envelope.’

‘You look lovely,’ he smiled.

‘Do you think so,’ she replied, flustered, looking down at herself. ‘It’s one of Dana’s. I wondered if it was too young for me.’

‘Sasha you’re thirty-three, not eighty-three. Now, what can I get you?’

‘Another champagne would be good.’

‘Coming up.’

He walked off to get her drink, and Sasha turned around to see what her sister was doing. She had bagged the man himself. The name Rocky Sanchez had meant little when Dana had said it, but now in the flesh, Sasha recognised him from Kylie’s celebrity mags. For some reason he was dressed as though auditioning for the *Mask of Zorro* – black shirt open to the naval, a red silk cummerbund and black trousers completing the effect. He was handsome in a swarthy sort of way, with tousled dark hair and five o’clock shadow. Dana looked like the cat who’d got the cream as she danced with him, and Sasha decided to leave them to it.

‘One glass of Bollinger,’ Seth said, laying it on the bar. ‘His Nibs has put ten grand behind here so you won’t have to pay a penny all night.’

‘Where do they get their money from?’

‘Magazine deals. Those rags pay a fortune to hear about their lives.’

Sasha didn’t mean to laugh, but the champagne had already started to loosen her tongue.

‘What’s funny?’ he asked.

‘My husband, or should I say soon to be ex-husband and his tart are doing a spread in OK! Luca kept begging me to do one for years, but I always refused because I thought they were tacky. Now he’s getting his moment in the sun before he fades away forever.’

‘Rumours are he’s going to be dropped from Sutton Town. Is that true?’

‘I certainly hope so.’

Seth laughed and was called away by a colleague. Sasha gulped down her second glass of champagne and started to feel tipsy. She rarely drank these days, and even the smallest amount of alcohol was bound to go straight to her head. After a while, the pumping music didn’t annoy her anymore and she even found herself tapping her foot. She couldn’t deny it was fun to be here

in the middle of London, surrounded by young, glamorous things; drinking free champagne and getting eyed up by the various men who passed by her. Maybe that was why Patty loved the party lifestyle – it fed her oh-so-delicate ego.

Seth brought her over another glass of champagne and leaned on the bar; looking up at her with those big, brown eyes, smiling that boyish smile.

‘I’m going to knock off at eleven and leave Shelley, my assistant manager to finish up. Do you fancy going somewhere more quiet?’

‘Why not?’ Sasha giggled. ‘Where were you thinking?’

‘Wherever you like.’

‘Well,’ she said, lifting her glass and sipping the bittersweet champagne. ‘My mother has got a fridge just containing champagne. Seeing as the selfish bitch has gone off and left me, I think I’ve got every right to drink some of it. So why don’t you come home with me?’

‘Alright,’ he smiled. ‘It’s a deal.’

The conscious part of Sasha’s brain couldn’t believe she’d invited a man home; but the sub-conscious - the part that had held onto the hurt for so long, wanted to rebel. She thought of all the times Luca went to parties like this and no doubt spent the night with some bimbo he’d picked up - that was how he’d saddled himself with Melanie in the first place. In fact, all the girls in here looked like her. It seemed the fake look was a uniform all women under the age of twenty-five were expected to wear. Sasha was glad she was old enough to be comfortable in her own skin and look how she wanted to.

Seth reappeared at eleven o’clock, looking younger and more relaxed, dressed in a Duffer t-shirt and baggy jeans. He had to help Sasha off her stool, because after five glasses of champagne she was quite drunk. When she got out into the fresh air, she thought she was going to pass out. Dizzy and a little nauseous, she clung onto Seth as he helped her into a taxi, climbing in beside her and trying his best to get her address out of her. He managed it and they set off, Sasha laying her head upon his shoulder.

‘I’ve had too much to drink,’ she slurred.

‘I think you can forget your mum’s champagne,’ he laughed. ‘What you need is a strong, black coffee.’

The taxi journey went by in flashes, and Sasha was aware she was falling asleep. When they arrived at Patty’s, Seth paid the driver and helped Sasha out. She could hear herself giggling and saying how nice it was to have a strong pair of arms around her, but it all sounded as though it was coming from someone else, not her.

Seth manoeuvred her into the living room, easing her down onto the sofa.

‘Right, where’s the kitchen?’ he asked.

‘Back of the house. The champagne’s in a fridge by the door.’

She started giggling again and Seth left the room. The tiny part of Sasha's brain that was still alert, asked what the hell she was doing. She didn't know Seth. He might have been like her father and some kind of killer. But the reckless part of her mind that the alcohol had awakened told her to shut up and enjoy the moment.

Seth returned with her mother's cafetiere and two cups, laying them on the coffee table in front of her.

'What's this?' she pouted. 'Where's my champagne?'

'You've had enough,' he smiled. 'It's black coffee all the way for you my girl.'

It felt strange for Sasha to be looked after. Normally it was Luca rolling in drunk, getting her up in the early hours of the morning to make him coffee and dry toast to stop him being sick. Seth was so good looking; from the trendy crop of his hair, to those big brown eyes and his rather long, but shapely nose. A drunken revelation hit her. He was Abie Cohen's nephew, which meant he must be Jewish. Sasha then wondered if he was circumcised and this made her giggle again.

He looked round at her.

'What's funny?'

'Are you circumcised?' she laughed.

He blushed and sat back with her, clutching his coffee cup close to his chest.

'Well you're certainly not going to find that out tonight,' he replied.

'I thought we were...that was why you came back here.'

'Much as I think you're gorgeous Sasha, I'm not going to take advantage of a drunk woman.'

'No one's ever told me I was gorgeous before.'

'Now I don't believe that.'

'Mum always told me I was too gawky. She was like a dainty little doll and I think she was disappointed that I was so tall. It was different for Rorie though. Rorie was pretty as well as tall.'

The coffee started to kick in and in the depths of Sasha's brain, a headache was beginning to make itself known.

'Where do you think your mum's gone?' Seth asked, laying his head upon hers.

'I've no idea. I've been uncovering some stuff about her. Horrible stuff. It's like she was a completely different person when she was younger. Sometimes I feel a bit stupid because I'm looking at all this deep and meaningful stuff and in reality Mum's probably just run off with some toyboy.'

'Why would she pretend she was missing though?'

‘Dunno. Perhaps he’s sixteen or something. Anything’s possible with my mother.’

‘You’re not close are you?’

‘Nope. Never have been. All three of us are a burden to her - me in particular. At least I know why now.’

Sasha stopped herself. The drink was making her say things she was going to regret, and she needed to shut up, fast.

‘Why’s that?’ he asked.

‘Well I guess I got in the way of her plans and all that. It would have been easier for her to pursue her writing career if I hadn’t been around.’

‘You hardly stopped her. She’s one of the most famous writers in the world. I remember when she gave my sister Jan a signed box set of her books for her eighteenth birthday. Jan couldn’t have been happier if she’d given her a Porsche.’

‘If I could only find out why she published Two Hearts; then I might find out why she disappeared.’

‘What do you mean?’

Sasha looked up into those doleful eyes and wondered if he was as trustworthy as he looked. Maybe it was time for her to take a leap of faith.

‘The other week this guy came to my house and told me he knew my mother when she was a girl. Apparently she had a thing for him and wrote him this book called Two Hearts, and it was exactly the same story as the one she published last year. After she gave it to him she disappeared, now she’s written the same story and disappeared again. Maybe it’s a coincidence, but you must admit, it is weird.’

‘Have you spoken to her agent? Found out why she published this book?’

‘No I haven’t. I just asked him if he had Mum’s diaries, which I now have.’

‘Has Phillipa uncovered anything?’

‘Lots of things. She’s been a great help. She’s going back to the estate my mum used to live on, next week. See what she can find out.’

‘I bet she loves doing this case. Because of how she looks, all she ever gets is honeytraps; which is pretty lame for someone who used to be a Detective Sergeant.’

‘Detective Sergeant? I didn’t realise. I just thought she was a PC.’

‘Oh no, she was one of the leading lights of the Met. They had great hopes for her; but when Jase died she just lost all interest. I think she wanted to be there for Maisie, so by being a PI she could pick and choose her own hours.’

‘I admire her. It must be hard bringing up a child on her own, *and* running a business. I really like her, I hope we stay friends.’

‘Oh you probably will. Filly hangs onto people. She could have dumped me when Jase died but we’ve stayed really good mates.’

‘What was Jason like?’

‘He was a great bloke. He couldn’t believe his luck when him and Filly got together. She lived in the posh house next door to his. Her dad was an army doctor and her mum was a magistrate. Jase’s dad was a car mechanic and they rented the house off the council. But they were made for each other. I don’t think Filly will ever marry again.’

‘Really? But she’s so young.’

‘Jase is a hard act to follow.’

Sasha’s head was starting to pound, and the drunkenness was just turning into a feeling of melancholy. Life was so miserable, and nothing good ever seemed to happen. To her embarrassment, she started to cry - all her tears of frustration and hurt coming out after weeks of bottling them up. Seth pulled her to him, laying her head on his shoulder.

‘I think someone needs their bed,’ he said.

She looked up at him, barely able to see him through her tears.

‘Stay with me,’ she whispered. ‘I don’t want to be alone.’

It felt strange for Sasha being in the same bed as another man. She’d grown so used to Luca, who would take up two thirds of the duvet, arms flung wide, snoring. Seth remained fully clothed, and over on the far side of the bed, so, even though she knew he was there, his presence remained discreet. Sasha was glad he was being a gentleman. Now sober, she realised the last thing she needed was another relationship - although she hoped they could be friends.

She fell off to sleep, and for the first time in ages, slept soundly. The next time she awoke, the room was light and Seth was sitting on the side of the bed, putting on his shoes.

‘What’s the time?’ she yawned.

‘Six thirty,’ he replied. ‘I’m going home to have a shave and change my clothes. It’s my nephew’s Bar Mitzvah today, so I’ve got to get all the way up to Leicester by midday.’

Sasha reached up and stroked his stubbly cheek.

‘Thanks for looking after me last night,’ she smiled. ‘And for not...you know.’

‘Like I said, I wasn’t going to take advantage of a drunken lady.’

He leaned forward and kissed her forehead.

‘I’ve got next Saturday off. Do you fancy doing something? Dinner? A film?’

‘Dinner would be nice,’ she replied, flattered he had asked her out.

‘Fantastic.’

He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a business card, handing it to Sasha.

‘Give me a ring in the week and we’ll make arrangements.’

He left and Sasha fell back off to sleep. She was awoken by Dana shaking her shoulders. She opened her eyes to find her sister looking a complete fright. Her hair had reverted back to its natural frizzy state, and she was still wearing her hideous outfit from the night before.

‘Where did you get to?’ Sasha yawned.

‘I went home with Rocky,’ she beamed. ‘And what about you? I saw you sloping off with that dishy barman.’

‘Nothing happened. I was too drunk.’

‘That’s a shame.’ She gave a theatrical yawn, raising her arms, and Sasha averted her eyes as her sisters ‘top’ rode up, showing her breasts. ‘I am shattered. I’m going up to sleep before heading out again tonight. Rocky’s taking me to Nobu.’

‘How nice.’

‘What are you up to?’

‘Nothing. Recovering from last night.’

Sasha made herself a bacon sandwich and settled in her mother’s study to get on with reading the diaries. Getting herself cosy, she snuggled up on the sofa, and moaned when she dropped a piece of bacon on the floor and had to move. Bending down to pick it up, she noticed something sticking out from underneath the sofa. It was a piece of paper, and as she pulled it out, she realised it was an airline docket. It was for an Aer Lingus flight to Dublin on 22nd November 2008. Alarm bells rang in Patsy’s mind. Her mother had friends with private jets - why would she fly with a budget airline like Aer Lingus? Had she gone to visit family? But the way the diary read, Molly’s family didn’t want to know her.

Putting her plate to one side, Sasha pulled out the sofa to see if there was anything else under there, but the flight docket was the only thing. She got up and went to her mother’s desk, where her day-to-day diary still lay. Flicking through the pages, she could see it was filled with lunches and dinners with various famous and important people. Saturday 22nd November 2008 was blank, as was the Sunday.

Sasha was desperate to let Phillipa know, but thought it was rude to disrupt her when she was enjoying some family time. Dana was asleep and she didn’t want to disturb her, but she was desperate to find out where her mother had gone on that day. She then remembered Mrs Watson. Since moving into the house, Sasha had told the housekeeper to take a holiday, as she found her a nuisance more than a help. Mrs Watson had gone off to her daughter’s in Norfolk but had come

back last night. She was at Patty's beck and call, so would have to know her diary like the back of her hand.

Putting on a pair of jeans and a jumper, Sasha ran a brush through her hair and left the main house. As she walked down the steps to the basement, she got a shiver down her spine, like someone was watching her. She looked around but no one was there and she told herself she was going mad.

Mrs Watson opened the door, looking irritated at being disturbed by her employer's daughter, who she seemed to think had no right to be living in the house in the first place.

'Can I speak to you Mrs Watson?' she asked. 'It's very important.'

'I suppose so. Come in.'

Mrs Watson's flat looked more like a country cottage than a flat in the middle of Central London. Filled with antiques, tapestry sofas and pot plants, it was very homely, and the French windows at the bottom trapped every bit of sunshine. It was all very cosy.

'Mrs Watson, did my mother ever mention going to Ireland?' Sasha asked.

'Ireland? No never, Mrs Fletcher. Oh tell a lie, she did do a promotional tour there a couple of years ago.'

'Only I found this under her sofa.'

She passed her the flight docket.

'November? I'll check her diary, sit down.'

Sasha perched on one of the sofas, while Mrs Watson opened the glass cabinet in the corner of the room. She pulled out a Letts diary and put on the glasses that were hanging around her neck. She sat opposite Sasha and flicked through the diary.

'November 22nd. It says Mrs Belleville was away with Mr DeVere.'

Paolo DeVere was one of Patty's friends. He was a celebrity antiques dealer and could usually be seen on *Bargain Hunt*. He was a vicious little queen and Sasha couldn't stand him. He'd been there the last Christmas she'd ever spent with her mother. Dana was skiing, so it was just her and Rorie, and Paolo had spent the entire time comparing the two sisters – wondering how one could be so beautiful and the other so plain.

'Do you know where they went?' she asked.

'It just says away.'

'Okay. I'll give him a ring and see what he says. Thanks Mrs Watson.'

'You know I'm sure Mrs Belleville will come back when she's ready.'

'Yes, you're probably right. But for my own peace of mind I want to find her.'

Sasha went back up to the house and into the office. Her mother's address book was in the top drawer of her desk, buried underneath a pile of Foxes Glacier Mint wrappers – the woman loved those sweets. Sasha opened it and found Paolo DeVere's number; bracing herself before calling. Naturally, his butler answered it for him, trying to fob her off until she started snapping, and he had to relent, fetching his master.

'Paolo DeVere,' he drawled in that reedy, irritating voice. Sasha always got the feeling he was probably common like Patty, and the posh accent was as fake as some of the antiques he sold.

'Paolo, it's Sasha Fletcher. Do you remember going away with my mother in November?'

'Why do you ask this?'

Sasha took a deep breath. Refusing to let him get to her.

'Because I've found an Aer Lingus docket dated the 22nd of November.'

'Aer Lingus!' he scoffed. 'Can you imagine us flying Aer Lingus? It can't be Patty's, because we went to St Cere that weekend. It must have been dropped by the housekeeper, or your sister.'

'Okay, thank you,' she replied, putting the phone down. Paolo always intimidated her, and she felt too nervous to probe him further. His explanation certainly sounded more plausible. St Cere in France was more Patty's thing than a cheapo flight to Dublin. She decided that the docket was probably Dana's, and she was just clutching at straws. Putting it back into her pocket, she returned to her mother's study and sat down at her desk, wondering what she was going to do now. She looked around the walls, laughing at Patty's vanity. She always cut notable reviews from publications and put them into clip-frames that she then hung up. Sasha skimmed over them but it was one from the *Sunday Times*, dated August 22nd 1986 that caught her eye. It was about 'Jezebel Rides Again' the fifth Jezebel Cole book. Sasha hadn't even read it. To her, if you'd read one Jezebel book you'd read them all. This review was written by a woman called Polly Cameron and was entitled 'Jezebel Finally Gets a Conscience'. Intrigued, Sasha read on further.

A senior Vatican official recently called Jezebel Cole 'A disgusting role model for 20th century women', and demanded the novels to be banned from Rome bookshops. For the uninitiated, Jezebel Cole is the fictional former high-class hooker who marries a rich Arab who then cheats on her with her best (male) friend; and in the last novel 'Jezebel's Voyage' Jezebel finally finds the courage to leave him. Jezebel Rides Again picks up where the indomitable Ms Cole finds herself on her uppers, and desperate to hang onto her luxurious lifestyle, she resorts to the one thing she's good at - opening a brothel in the middle of Rome.

Patty Belleville has not changed the formula to the Jezebel books since the very first one in 1977, but why should she when it's such a winning formula? Filled with sex, fashion, exotic locations and handsome men, it's the perfect beach read. Jezebel even gets a conscience in this book; and when a young battered wife comes to her looking for a job; rather than introduce her to prostitution, she sends her to the nearest plastic surgeon, paying for her to change her face so she can get away from the husband who is beating her. Seems there's more to Jezebel than meets the eye.

Sasha wondered if this was another clue? Did Patty have plastic surgery because Jimmy beat her? Surely back then she wouldn't have been able to afford it. Procedures were expensive enough in 2009 let alone 1975! Perhaps the storyline was just another product of Patty's imagination, and there was some other reason why her looks had seemingly changed.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

November 1975

Patsy felt awful. Her back was killing her and she felt sick. All she wanted to do was crawl into bed and hope the world would go away. But instead, she had Jimmy waltzing around the flat, preening himself, singing that bloody '*Wide Eyed and Legless*' song as he went. Patsy was sitting at the kitchen table, trying to put her make up on, balancing a tiny mirror against a tin of beans. At seven months pregnant, the last thing she wanted to do was tart herself up and go to a nightclub. Jimmy's mate, Chrissy Low was opening a club in town and Jimmy was determined to go to the first night, desperate to show he was still a player. Right now, Patsy wished he was like other blokes - insisting she stayed at home, while he went out on the pull.

Jimmy wasn't like that. He never looked at other women. He was obsessed with Patsy and confessed to her that he had been since they were at school. At first she'd found it wonderful - finally having someone to love her, who she could love back; but after that night last Christmas - when he punched her in the face - their relationship had taken a sinister turn. Jimmy had become increasingly possessive. The furthest he would allow her to go on her own was to the local shops to get groceries, and when she came back he would cross examine her, trying to find out if she'd been speaking to other men.

Despite living in constant fear, Patsy had never felt so loved and protected; especially when he'd tell her that if she left him he'd kill himself. No one outside would believe it. He was cocky Jimmy Lee, famous on their estate for his wheeling and dealing, his good looks and his handy fists. Nobody would believe that after he'd hit her across the face or pulled her hair, he would crawl into a ball, tearing at his clothes and sobbing, begging for forgiveness; saying he only did it because he was so jealous and loved her too much.

He hadn't hit her since the baby had started to show. Instead he made her stay in all the time, only going out when he could accompany her. Patsy felt fat, sick and unattractive and tried to reassure him that no one would fancy her anyway; but he wasn't having any of it and made that grotty council flat into a fortress. Patsy wasn't even allowed to go to the hospital to have check ups, in case there was a male doctor there. The only reassurance she had that her baby was okay was when she felt it moving.

Patsy was so nervous about having this baby. She was scared that Jimmy would feel as possessive towards it as he did her, and this would spill over into violence. She only hoped that the child would calm him down, make him realise she was dedicated to him and wanted to build a family. She hated it when he scared her, but just like she used to separate herself into Jessica Cole, so she did the same with Jimmy. The boy who cuddled her, ran her baths, brought her lovely jewellery, cooked her dinner - that was Jimmy. The monster who hit her and threatened her and tied her to the bed to stop her going out was someone else. He couldn't help himself. He was ill. He loved her too much and it made him angry.

She finished getting ready. In her plain black smock, she knew she'd look frumpy compared to the other glamorous girls in the club. She wondered why Jimmy even wanted her on his arm - she'd hardly create a good impression. Levering herself up, she turned and asked him how she looked.

‘Too much lipstick,’ he replied. ‘Take it off.’

He threw a tea towel at her and she did as she was told. The cotton towel scratched her lips and made them sore, but she didn’t dare complain. Once she was done, Jimmy came over to her and peered at her face, examining her. Patsy felt her legs start to tremble with fright. If he thought she hadn’t obeyed him, it might be enough to tip him over the edge.

‘You’ll do,’ he said. ‘Come on, get your coat.’

They took a taxi into town. Jimmy looked so handsome in his velvet suit, and shirt with the ruffles down the front. All the while they travelled he held on tightly to Patsy’s hand, to stop her getting away from him. He didn’t even want her sitting on the far end of the taxi seat - she had to be right by his side.

The club was on Heddon Street, just off Regent Street. It was in a basement and Patsy winced at the thought of walking down the steps to get in there; but like a gentleman, Jimmy helped her down and led her into the already packed nightclub. *That’s the Way (I Like It)* by KC and the Sunshine Band was pumping out, and Patsy felt a little sad that she didn’t have the energy to dance. She looked around at the pretty young things in their short shirts and skin-tight trousers, boogieing away and throwing admiring glances at her gorgeous boyfriend as he strode into the place as though he owned it, and knew she couldn’t dream of competing.

From out of the throng, Chrissy Low appeared. He was a school friend of Jimmy’s brother Stephen and had made a fortune by running various long firms and illegal gambling rackets. Now here he was, the owner of a club in the middle of London, with a foot in legitimacy - although he still looked like a spiv to Patsy.

‘Hello Jimmy mate,’ he said, grasping his hand. ‘Can I get you some champagne?’

‘That’d be great mate,’ Jimmy replied. ‘And an orange juice for Patsy.’

‘Can’t I just have one glass of champagne?’ she asked.

‘No you can’t,’ he replied with humour in his voice, but his eyes told a different story. That steeliness came into them and suddenly Patsy felt very nervous. Chrissy went off to get the drinks and Jimmy suddenly gripped the top of her arm, squeezing so hard she felt her circulation stop. She didn’t dare cry out in pain, it would only make him more angry.

‘Do you want to fucking fall over and hurt the baby?’ he hissed. ‘I’ll kill you if you do.’

‘I didn’t mean to ask for champagne,’ she winced. ‘I’m sorry Jimmy.’

‘You will be.’

Chrissy returned with the drinks; Patsy took her orange juice and remained quiet.

‘So what do you think of the place?’ Chrissy asked. ‘Impressive eh? It used to be a gentleman’s barbers. Now look at it. They reckon there’ll be a disco on every street by 1980. It’s a market to get into Jimmy.’

‘I ain’t got the gelt Chris,’ Jimmy replied. ‘I would otherwise.’

‘It ain’t all about money Jim. We could do with some muscle around here. Come and have a chat.’

Jimmy looked at Patsy and pointed at the bar.

‘You stay there. I’m going to talk to Chrissy. And don’t talk to anyone.’

Without question Patsy heaved herself onto a bar stool and watched as her boyfriend disappeared into the crowd with his friend. She felt so stupid, stuck here alone, drinking orange juice, bopping her head to the disco music, while the world around her had fun. She wished Jimmy hadn’t brought her here tonight. Why couldn’t he have waited until the baby was born? Then they could have got a babysitter and at least she could have had a drink and a dance.

When she felt someone slump beside her and start talking, a patter of fear covered her body. If Jimmy saw her chatting to a man, he’d go mad.

‘It is Jessica isn’t it?’ the man said and Patsy didn’t dare look at him. The only people who knew her as Jessica were her former clients. This was a nightmare come true. She’d had bad dreams about bumping into someone she used to sleep with, while she was out with Jimmy, and now it was happening.

‘Come on Jessica,’ he continued. ‘I’d recognise you a mile off.’

She dared to turn around and realised it was a man called Humphrey. He was a particularly slimy member of the aristocracy with a penchant for call-girls, nightclubbing and gambling. He was pissed, just as he always had been whenever Patsy had been with him. He noticed her stomach and his piggy eyes opened wide.

‘You’re in the family way!’ he exclaimed. He then giggled. ‘What naughty client is responsible for that?’

‘Please go away,’ she winced. ‘I don’t know who you are.’

‘Don’t pretend not to know me. You were a great little lay from what I can remember.’

Patsy almost passed out with fear when she noticed Jimmy coming through the crowd. She tried to clamber down off the stool to get away, but was rigid with terror.

‘What the fuck’s going on?’ he barked.

‘Jimmy, I...’

‘So you’re the naughty punter then,’ Humphrey laughed. ‘You should have known better old chap.’

‘Punter?’ Jimmy frowned. ‘What are you talking about?’

‘I used to be one of Jessica here’s regulars. She’s a pro in every sense of the word.’

‘He’s mistaken me for someone else,’ she cried.

‘If I’ve mistaken you for someone else,’ he laughed. ‘How come I know you’ve got a birthmark the shape of a crescent moon on your stomach?’

Patsy felt like the condemned woman. Only someone who’d seen her naked would know this fact about her body. Jimmy grabbed her arm and pulled her off her stool. People watched as he dragged her out of the club, this time forcing her up the steps so violently she thought she was going to fall over. He pulled her along Heddon Street and into an alleyway that led onto Regent Street. He violently threw her against the wall, and terrified, Patsy looked around, desperate for someone to come along and help her. Jimmy clasped her throat, lifting her up. It was a struggle to breathe. She clawed at his arm, wanting him to stop. Wanting to remind him he was hurting the baby too.

‘You fucking whore,’ he hissed. ‘I’m going to kill you.’

‘I only did it for a while,’ she gasped. ‘Mum made me do it.’

‘Old Molly never entertained posh blokes like that. Why did he call you Jessica?’

‘It’s what I used to call myself. I only did it for a while when Susan and I moved in together. I stopped as soon as I started seeing you.’

He suddenly let her go and Patsy collapsed in a heap on the dirty ground, convinced he had stopped. Perhaps it was enough for him to know she hadn’t done it since they’d been together.

She was wrong; before she had the chance to move out the way, he lifted his leg and stamped it down upon her stomach. Patsy screamed, terrified for the baby. She curled into a foetal position, gripping her arms across her stomach.

‘Not my baby,’ she screamed. ‘Not my baby.’

‘Alright,’ he hissed. ‘Not your baby.’

He crouched beside her and with one hand, stroked her hair back tenderly. Still Patsy clung to the hope he’d realised what he was doing and had stopped.

‘I’m going to make sure you can never sell yourself again.’

Out of nowhere, his other hand came towards her face, clutching a rock. The most horrendous pain shot across her head and everything went black.

The next time Patsy opened her eyes, the world was hazy and white. There were noises and it felt warm, and when she tried to breathe through her nose, she found she couldn’t. It felt like the worst possible dose of flu, when both nostrils are clogged up and you feel as though you’re going to suffocate. She lifted her hand to her face and to her horror realised all she could feel were bandages.

‘Don’t touch your face dear,’ a voice said. ‘You’ve got to let it heal.’

Patsy turned her head to where the voice was coming from and through the haze could see a woman in a uniform - her hair covered with a white hat. A nurse. This was hospital. It then all came back to her – the nightclub. Humphrey. Jimmy kicking her in the stomach.

‘My baby,’ she cried, trying to crane her head to see her stomach. ‘My baby.’

‘Your baby’s fine,’ replied the nurse. ‘He’s got a strong heartbeat and is moving around. Let me wipe your eyes, they’re all cloudy.’

The nurse wiped Patsy’s eyes with damp cloth, and when she opened them again, she could see more clearly. She looked around. She was in a hospital bed, in a ward; with a kindly faced nurse beside her.

‘What hospital am I in?’ she asked.

‘St Thomas’s darling,’ she said. ‘What’s your name?’

‘Jessica.’ She said it without thinking.

‘The police are here to speak to you Jessica. Do you think you could talk to them?’

‘I suppose so,’ she uttered.

The nurse walked off, and while she was gone, Patsy lifted her hands to her face. There was a bandage all around her chin and up around her head. Her nose was also covered in plasters and dressing. She wondered if Jimmy had told the police what he’d done. If he hadn’t, she was going to tell them she didn’t know who’d done it. She didn’t want them to find him. She had the baby to think about, and in that alley he’d tried to kill it. If she grassed on him, he would find her and finish what he’d started.

She ran her hand over her tummy and her eyes filled with tears. The thought of something happening to her child made her want to die. It was the only good thing in her life and she was so thankful it had survived.

The nurse came back, this time followed by two men in smart suits. The sight of plain clothes policemen still struck terror into Patsy’s heart. They always reminded her of Roger and his horrible colleagues.

‘Darling these are the police officers who’d like to speak to you,’ the nurse said. She looked at the two men, pulling a disapproving face. ‘Don’t be too hard on her. She’s in a bad way.’

She walked off and the police officers both drew up chairs beside Patsy’s bed. The older one came closer to her. He was the same sort of age as Roger and Patsy felt scared, pushing herself back into the pillows, desperate to get away from him.

‘Hello Jessica,’ he said. ‘I’m Detective Inspector Carlton, this is Detective Sergeant Yorke. What’s your surname love?’

‘Cole,’ she whispered, and watched as the younger officer noted this down.

‘What happened last night?’ Carlton asked.

‘I can’t remember,’ she replied.

‘Okay, what were you doing in Heddon Street?’

‘I’d been shopping on Regent Street. I got lost. He grabbed me from behind. I can’t remember anything else.’

‘You were found by a vagrant. He told us that there was a boot mark on your stomach. That’s most unusual. Most people who attack pregnant women avoid the stomach. Unless it’s someone they know.’

‘I don’t know anyone who’d do that,’ she replied, aware that her jaw was very stiff and if she moved it too much, the pain was horrendous.

‘You had no money on you when you were found. Did you have a handbag or a purse with you?’

‘Yes,’ she lied. ‘He must have taken that.’

‘Where do you live Jessica? Is there anyone you can contact?’

Where could she say she lived? Not with Jimmy. She had no friends - except Susan. Maybe Susan was still in Battersea.

‘Number eighteen Belleville Road, Battersea. Flat four.’

‘And do you live with anyone?’

‘My flatmate, Susan.’

‘So you honestly did not get to see any part of your assailant? He didn’t speak or anything?’

‘No. It was over so quickly.’

Suddenly there were footsteps and she looked round to find the nurse walking towards them, that stern look upon her face.

‘Can you finish up here gentlemen?’ she asked. ‘The doctor wants to have a look at Jessica.’

‘We’ll come back,’ Carlton said, standing up. ‘Maybe Jessica’s memory will improve when she’s feeling better.’

The two men walked off, and the nurse set about making Patsy comfortable, propping her up while she plumped her pillows. Patsy noticed her name badge said ‘Nurse S Favreau’, it was an unusual name.

‘Favreau?’ she said.

‘It’s French,’ the nurse replied. ‘My dad was from Normandy.’

‘What’s the S stand for?’

‘Sasha.’

‘That’s a nice name,’ Patsy mused. ‘Maybe I’ll call my baby Sasha if it’s a girl.’

‘Where’s your husband?’

‘I don’t have a husband?’

‘Well baby must have a dad.’

‘Not any more. We split up ages ago.’

‘I don’t know,’ Nurse Favreau tutted. ‘You modern young girls thinking you can cope on your own. Men do have some uses you know.’

They were shortly joined by the doctor - a very handsome young man with dark hair and dark eyes. He sat on the bed and looked at Patsy, and she felt self-conscious at him seeing her looking so horrid.

‘How are you Jessica?’ he asked. ‘Are you experiencing any pain yet?’

‘If I open my mouth too wide, it hurts’ she replied.

We had to be careful how much painkiller we gave you. Too much could have harmed the child. How far advanced are you?’

‘Seven months.’

‘Due date?’

‘I don’t have one.’

‘You don’t have a due date? Who’s your doctor?’

‘I don’t have a doctor. I don’t need a doctor.’ She was starting to panic.

‘Okay, okay, calm down. I’m afraid there has been extensive damage to your face. Your nose has been shattered, as has your jaw. Once you’re recovered and have had the baby, we will reconstruct your face.’ He laughed wanly. ‘You’ll get a free nose job! Your jaw will probably never look the same again either.’

‘How long will I be in here for?’

‘A few weeks I’d say. We need to get that swelling down on your face.’

‘Can’t I stay here until the baby’s born?’ she gasped.

‘I’m afraid not,’ he replied. ‘Don’t worry about being seen in public. You’re very young; your skin will heal quickly. How old are you by the way?’

‘Nineteen.’

‘What’s your date of birth?’

‘Tenth of June 1956.’

‘And who is your next of kin?’

‘I don’t have one.’

‘No one? Okay. Well you get some sleep. Nurse will be round later with some more painkillers.’

He got up and walked off, and Nurse Favreau patted Patsy’s hand.

‘Like he said, get some sleep,’ she whispered. ‘I’ll see you later.’

Patsy tried to stay awake, scared that Jimmy would find out where she was and come in and kill her. But in the end, the painkillers in her system were too strong to fight, and before she knew it, she’d dropped off. When she next awoke, she once again found Nurse Favreau beside her bed. But this time she wasn’t in uniform and instead sat there in her coat, clutching her bag to her chest.

‘How’s the face?’ she smiled.

‘Starting to throb,’ Patsy winced.

‘Jessica, can I ask you something?’

‘What?’

She leaned forward, coming closer, looking around the ward as if to check no one was listening.

‘Did the baby’s father do this to you?’

‘N-No.’

‘My sister helps run a home for battered wives over in Chiswick. I’ve helped out there myself, before and I’ve seen girls like you - heavily pregnant and yet they hadn’t seen a doctor. Did he stop you going in case the doctor was male?’

‘Yes,’ she whispered, astounded at the nurse’s perception.

‘What happened?’

‘We were at a party in a club. A man was talking to me and J....my boyfriend went mad. He dragged me out of the club and into the alley and he beat me up.’

‘You poor little thing. From your injuries I’d say he wanted to kill you. Do you live with him?’

‘Yes.’

‘Okay. Well let me call Lois, see if we can get you into Priory House once you’re out of here.’

‘Are you sure? Do you think you could?’

‘You leave it to me.’

‘Please don’t tell the police. I don’t want them finding him.’

‘My darling, if the police knew the truth, they wouldn’t even be interested. It’s a domestic dispute. Nothing for them to worry about.’

By the next day, the pain was a little more intense and yet Patsy felt as though she had more movement in her jaw. She could have almost cried with joy when she felt her baby move - it was as though it was letting her know it was okay. She ran her hand over her stomach and said a silent apology to it. She’d wanted everything to be perfect for her child. She and Jimmy were going to be the best parents in the world and it would want for nothing. Instead, it was probably going to be born in a home for battered wives. And when they chucked her out, where would she go then? Back to Jimmy no doubt.

‘Penny for them?’

She looked round. Nurse Favreau was beside her bed, her medicine trolley at her side.

‘How’s the face?’ she asked.

‘Painful.’

‘I spoke to Lois. There’s a bed waiting for you as soon as you get out of here.’

‘Thank you,’ Patsy cried. ‘Thank you so much.’

From out of nowhere, Carlton and Yorke appeared. For a moment Patsy panicked, wondering if Nurse Favreau had betrayed her confidence and had told the police about what had really happened.

‘How are you feeling Jessica?’ Carlton asked. ‘Or should we say Patsy?’

Her blood ran cold.

‘H-How did you find out?...’

‘We went to the address you gave us. It’s now occupied by a young Ghanian man. The downstairs neighbour did inform us that the flat used to be occupied by two girls called Susan and Patsy. They said Patsy was a young half-caste girl, so I’m assuming that’s you. Why did you lie about your name Patsy?’

‘Gentlemen if I could have a word,’ Nurse Favreau said. ‘Outside.’

Unwilling to disobey a nurse, the two officers followed her outside. Patsy wished she had bionic hearing so she could find out what was being said about her. What would she do if they found Jimmy? He would surely try and kill her again.

The three of them soon returned to the ward, Carlton bearing an almost contrite expression.

‘Nurse Favreau has explained the situation Patsy,’ he said. ‘I take it you do not want to press charges against your baby’s father?’

‘No,’ she whispered.

‘Very well. We’ve no further questions here. I hope you recover soon.’

With that, the two officers walked out. Patsy was incredulous and relieved at the same time. She was glad they were going to leave Jimmy alone, but also incensed that even though he had almost killed her, because they considered her to be his ‘property’, he somehow had the right to do as he liked. It seemed no matter what happened in life, women were made to suffer.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Sasha awoke to the sound of squealing, and thought the house was on fire. Opening her eyes, she discovered Dana next to her on the bed, jumping up and down in excitement. She was still in the clothes she'd had on the night before, when she went out with Rocky. She'd obviously just come in.

'You're in the papers!' she squealed, brandishing the *News of the World* at Sasha. 'You're in the papers.'

'Me? Why am I in this paper? I haven't done any interviews yet.'

'It's about you and that hunky barman.'

She laid the paper across Sasha's lap. It was open at the showbiz page and in the top left hand corner were two photographs - one of Sasha, being propped up by Seth as they went into the house. The other showed Seth leaving the next morning, unshaven and in the same clothes. The small piece accompanying it read;

Soon to be former WAG Sasha Fletcher is clearly getting over her break-up from hubby, Sutton Town striker Luca. Sasha 33 who is currently staying in the house belonging to her missing mother, novelist Patty Belleville, was seen arriving home on Friday night with a handsome mystery man, only for him to leave the next morning, clearly exhausted after having a good night. You go girl!

'Isn't it fantastic!' Dana beamed. 'It'll rub Luca's nose right in it.'

'Someone was watching the house,' Sasha uttered. 'I thought I could sense it, but told myself I was going mad. Someone was waiting outside here and taking pictures.'

'Don't worry about it. They were probably waiting for me and got you instead. Look Sass, Luca dumped you for that bimbo. Why shouldn't you have some fun?'

Sasha couldn't look at it that way. She was horrified at the thought of someone hiding in bushes, taking pictures of her. There had been plenty of times when Luca had been in the news, and their front door had been blocked by paps all waiting to get a picture; but they would normally be upfront about it, or sometimes if they went out to dinner, someone would jump out and take a photo. But this was different. This person had concealed themselves. And what about Seth? He never asked to be involved in any of it.

She grabbed her mobile phone. She had to call him and apologise, hoping he'd forgive her for inadvertently splashing him all over the papers.

'Perhaps you should see my agent,' Dana babbled on. 'If you're going to be famous, you want proper representation.'

'I'm not going to be famous,' Sasha snapped, waiting for Seth to answer. 'Unlike you, I value my privacy.'

Seth answered. He sounded tired, and Sasha remembered he'd been to that Bar Mitzvah the day before – he was probably exhausted.

‘Seth I’m so sorry. Have you seen the papers?’

‘No, I’m still in my hotel bed,’ he yawned. ‘What is it?’

‘There must have been a photographer hanging around outside my house on Friday night and yesterday morning. We’re in the News of the World and it’s implying that we spent the night together.’

‘Well we did,’ he chuckled.

‘Yes, but not in the way they’re saying. I’m so sorry to drag your name through the papers.’

‘Hey don’t be silly. It’s not like I work for MI5 or something. I’ve nothing to hide. Besides, it’ll be good publicity for the bar.’

‘You don’t hate me?’ she whimpered.

‘Course I don’t. I’ll see you on Saturday. Now let me get back to sleep.’

‘Okay. See you then.’

She ended the call and before she could do anything, the landline rang.

‘Sasha, Darius Whitby. I see you’ve made the papers.’

‘Yes, unwittingly. Nothing happened between me and the guy.’

‘Don’t worry about it. All publicity is good publicity. In fact, that’s why I’m calling you. Your mother was supposed to be accompanying me to the Art in Media Awards tomorrow afternoon at the Grosvenor Park Hotel. Obviously she can’t come with me and I was wondering if you could instead.’

‘I don’t think so Darius. I’m not a writer.’

‘You illustrate books don’t you? Look, the Best New Novelist award is sponsored by Patty and someone needs to represent her.’

‘Alright,’ she groaned. ‘I’m meeting with a journalist from The Crucible in the morning. What time does this event start?’

‘Three o’clock. Wear something nice. I’ll pick you up from home.’ He then promptly ended the call.

‘Where are you going?’ Dana asked excitedly.

‘Are you still here?’ Sasha sighed.

‘Don’t be like that. I think it’s really exciting you’re getting a media profile. Where are you going tomorrow?’

‘The Art in Media Awards, with Darius. That’ll be fun. I suppose I’d better go out today and get a dress.’

‘Shopping!’ Dana exclaimed, clapping her hands together. ‘Can I come?’

‘Aren’t you tired? You’ve been out all night.’

‘I’ll be fine. Rocky and I have done enough Charlie to keep a herd of elephants up for a week. Let me go and get changed and we’ll set off for Bond Street.’

Much to Sasha’s chagrin, she found shopping with Dana more fun than she’d expected. They hit the shops of Bond Street to find her an outfit for the awards ceremony, and she was surprised when it seemed every shop assistant knew her sister personally and treated her like she was a member of the royal family. She was offered endless dresses, and while Sasha wanted something understated and stylish, Dana kept trying to get her to dress like a showgirl. In the end she plumped for a pewter coloured 1920s style dress with a crumb catcher neckline. Dana insisted that it would look fabulous with Sasha’s bob and dragged her to Oxford Street and into a branch of Claires Accessories to get a cheap flower hairpin to match. The shop was full of teenage girls who were thrilled to see Dana Perry in there, and while Sasha mooched around looking at the brightly coloured bags and hair slides, her sister signed autographs and basked in the attention.

Once they’d finished shopping, the girls went into Browns for lunch, and as Sasha wasn’t driving she allowed herself a couple of glasses of wine and got a bit tipsy. She was beginning to wonder why she hadn’t let her hair down ages ago. She opened up to her sister and told her everything; all the things she’d found out about Patty and the truth about Jimmy Lee. Dana was horrified but promised not to tell Rorie. They both knew their sister wouldn’t be so understanding about being related to a murderer by proxy.

It was only when she got home, Sasha realised her mobile had been ringing and she hadn’t heard it. Flopping on the sofa, still slightly drunk, she called her voicemail. The moment she heard Luca’s ranting voice, she wished she hadn’t.

‘What the fuck do you think you’re doing Sasha?’ he barked. ‘We’re not even divorced and you’re seeing another bloke. Forget the ten million. I’m going to tell Edwin to draw up an agreement giving you a flat and half a million and nothing else.’

That was the end of the message. For a moment Sasha sat staring at her phone, convinced she’d imagined what she just heard. Luca had thrown her out of her home because he’d moved his pregnant mistress in and he was now throwing a tantrum because she had ‘seen’ another man. Sobering up quickly, she called her former home, ready to let rip at her husband. Instead she got Melanie.

‘93729,’ the young girl said, trying to sound posh.

‘I want to speak to my husband.’

‘Ex-husband.’

‘Husband. Where is he?’

‘On a coach on the way back from Middlesbrough probably. What do you want?’

‘I want to speak to him. I’ll call his mobile.’

She ended the call and phoned Luca’s mobile. She knew he liked to sleep on his way back from away matches. But she didn’t care. This was important.

‘Don’t call me while I’m on the coach Sasha,’ he said. ‘Phone me later.’

‘No, I don’t want to phone you later. What the hell are you going on about?’

‘I felt bad about chucking you out, that’s why I offered you ten million. Well you’ve clearly moved on, so you’re getting half a million.’

‘We’ll see about that. I’m going to see Henry McGregor on Tuesday. He’s my mother’s solicitor.’

‘Fine. I’ll see you in court.’

He ended the call and Sasha threw her phone across the room. Why was life so frustrating and awful?

If Sasha had had any reservations about airing Luca’s dirty linen to The Daily Crucible, then she didn’t now. She relished the thought of giving the interview to Natalie Edwards, and letting the world know what Luca was really like. They met in a room in the Mandarin Hotel, and after a photographer had taken some pictures, they settled down to chat. Still driven by her anger, Sasha spilled the beans on everything – Luca’s fears about his career; his bad temper; his numerous affairs. She didn’t hold back anything. She left the hotel feeling empowered. She’d always been the coward, the one who said nothing and let Rorie and Dana do the fighting. Well she’d had enough of being nice. She was Patty Belleville’s daughter and it was about time she started acting like it.

Darius Whitby picked her up in his chauffeur driven car and they headed over to the Grosvenor Hotel. Sasha couldn’t stand Whitby and normally would do all she could to avoid him; but today she decided to make the most of this time alone with him.

‘Did Mum ever say to you why she published Two Hearts?’ she asked, smoothing out a tiny crease that had appeared in her beautiful satin dress.

‘Well that was the funny thing. She was half way through the latest Jezebel book. It was going to be a belter, Jezebel was going to inadvertently end up standing for parliament and everything. It was all good to go, then suddenly Patty lost all interest; and in about two weeks came up with Two Hearts and gave that to the publisher.’

‘And she never said why?’

‘No. She seemed to lose interest in writing and just wanted to fulfil her quota. As soon as I read it, I knew it would be a flop. Patty Belleville is synonymous with raunch. Not soppy romances’

‘And when was this?’

‘Early last Spring.’

‘Did Mum ever mention going to Ireland to you? Only I found an Aer Lingus docket in her house.’

‘Not that I know of,’ he replied. ‘Only the odd promotional thing.’ He laughed. ‘And I can’t see Patty travelling by Aer Lingus.’

The Art in Media Awards was Sasha’s idea of hell. In some ways she would rather be back at Lexi’s with the Z-listers and wannabes than these types who thought they were a cut above everyone else because they were involved in the arts. Patty loved to schmooze with theatre actors; art critics; authors and playwrights; but Sasha thought they were full of bullshit and yearned to tell them so.

She and Darius were seated with the authors Mohammed Aktar and Andrew Hart. Aktar had written a book about his childhood in Iraq under the rule of Saddam Hussein, and it had won the Booker prize. There were talks about it being nominated for the Nobel, and from the filthy looks he kept giving Sasha, he obviously found it distasteful to be sharing a table with the daughter of a woman who wrote dirty books for people to read on the beach. Sasha felt strangely defensive of her mother. Patty may not have written high-brow stuff, but her books had given a lot of people pleasure over the years.

‘I won’t have to present this award will I?’ she asked Darius ‘I don’t want to speak in front of all these people.’

‘No, some young actor’s going to do it.’

‘That’s good.’

She was interrupted by a hand upon her shoulder. Jumping slightly, she looked round to find it was Daffyd, Paolo’s partner. He was a lovely man who worked as an art critic for *The Evening Standard*. Sasha never understood what he saw in the bitchy Paolo. Then again, they always did say opposites attract.

‘Sasha darling,’ he said. ‘Lovely to see you.’

She stood up to face him, glad to get away from Aktar’s looks of disapproval.

‘Hello Daffyd,’ she replied, kissing him on both cheeks. ‘How are you?’

‘Oh you know darling,’ he said, rolling his eyes. ‘Another boring awards do...’ He laughed and brushed her arm. ‘Anyway, any word from that mother of yours?’

‘None. I’m beginning to lose hope.’

‘I bet she’s just run off with that toyboy of hers.’

‘Toyboy?’

‘Well, I assumed she had a toyboy, or had joined Al Qaeda or something. There had to be some reason why she kept going off and using Paolo as a cover.’

‘What?’

‘Before she disappeared, she must have gone on about ten weekends away and always made Paolo promise that if anyone asked where she’d been, he’d say she’d been with us. I thought you knew.’

‘No I didn’t. Have you heard from her since she was missing?’

‘Not a peep.’

Sasha lowered her voice.

‘Only I found an Aer Lingus flight docket in her house. It was for Saturday November 22nd last year. Her housekeeper reckoned she was with Paolo on that date, and when I called him, he said she’d been in St Cere with him.’

‘November 22nd is my birthday, and Paolo was in St Cere, but he was with me, and Patty certainly wasn’t with us.’

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

June 1976

It was Patsy's twentieth birthday, and no one could understand why she was sad. She was living in a home where most of the residents were on the waiting list for a council flat grottier than the one they'd left; or had no choice but to return to the husbands who had beaten them and made them run away in the first place. However Patsy had just been told she was going to be paid ten thousand pounds as an advance for her novel 'The Tale of Jezebel Cole'. She also had a beautiful five month old baby, who was so well behaved, the other mums envied her. Sasha was a dream, hardly ever crying and never complaining when someone else fed or changed her – which was becoming increasingly often.

Patsy found it hard to get enthusiastic about her baby. When she'd had her, she'd adored her on sight. Sasha was gorgeous and healthy and she finally had something to love and look after. But coming home to Priory House, sharing a bathroom with ten other women - never having any real privacy; an overwhelming feeling of failure enveloped her. She was no better than her own mother. Molly had stupidly had a baby with a black man, long before it became acceptable. She should have known it would end in disaster and it had. Augustus was killed and Molly had become an alcoholic wreck, forced to sell her body to make ends meet.

Now Patsy had brought her daughter into a world that was just as depressing. When she'd got pregnant, she'd had such hopes - Jimmy would stop hitting her and they could become a proper family. But she hadn't even been able to hold onto that.

She'd started writing The Tale of Jezebel Cole when she was eight months' pregnant. Because of the state of her face, she'd been too shy to mix with the other girls in the home and had ensconced herself in her room, writing away, turning her life story into a novel. Jessica Cole became Jezebel Cole because that's what Patsy felt like – a fallen woman. Even now she blamed herself for Jimmy's final attack. If she hadn't been a prostitute, he would never have tried to kill her.

The novel was easy to write. Sasha slept most of the time, so Patsy could lie in bed, writing her book, thinking back over all the people who'd shaped her life. Her mother became Colleen, a high class madam. Susan became Suki Millar, a one armed prostitute, William became Patrick Rivers, the kindly solicitor who takes care of Jezebel; and Jimmy became Salim, the love of Jezebel's life who breaks her heart by sleeping with her male best friend. Writing that had given Patsy great pleasure. If Jimmy ever found out he'd been portrayed as a latent homosexual, he would be furious.

She'd had no intention of showing the novel to anyone, until one day Lucy Nixon, the founder of the home, visited. She was a rich woman who had dedicated her life to helping others. She'd been brave enough to admit that her army officer husband had once beaten her to a pulp, and after divorcing him, she decided to open a home for battered wives. She often came to see the women, and on this occasion she picked up the manuscript that lay on Patsy's bedside cabinet. She asked if she could take it away and Patsy reluctantly agreed. Two days later Lucy came back, begging Patsy to let her show it to her father, Reginald Chisholm, who owned Nova Publishing.

Patsy had almost forgotten about it until the beginning of June, when Reginald came to visit her, telling her he wanted to publish it. Patsy had thought he was teasing her and it had taken several attempts for him to convince her he was serious. He also told her he would be willing to pay her a ten thousand pound advance for her to live on until she wrote her next novel. This was enough money for her to buy a flat and hire a nanny to look after Sasha while she got on with her writing. It was like a fairytale. So why did she feel so sad?

As wonderful as it was never to have to worry about money again, to be paid to do the thing she loved, who did Patsy have to share it with? She didn't know where her mother or Susan or William were. She was too scared to leave the house in case she saw Jimmy. Not that she looked anything like the girl he almost killed back in December. She couldn't bear to look in the mirror anymore. She'd always been a pretty girl, but Jimmy had left her with a squashed nose like a boxer's and a large lump in the middle of her chin. She looked hideous and she wished someone could wave a magic wand and make her normal again.

She spent her birthday in the lounge room of Priory House. It was unusually quiet today - normally it was filled with the noise of women and children. Sometimes there would be a husband banging on the door, demanding to see his wife, and when this happened, the house would go into a state of panic - men still made most of the women nervous. Today Patsy was sharing the lounge with Gloria, a young woman who had escaped her husband after he burned her back with an iron. She was the closest Patsy had to a friend, and was always very good with Sasha. Patsy was glad of this; she loved Sasha more than anything in the whole world but she was convinced that the less she had to do with her daughter, the better. She felt somehow cursed and didn't want that to rub off on her precious child.

The phone in the hall started to ring, and Patsy cursed under her breath, worried it was going to wake Sasha up. She was asleep on the floor in her Moses basket and Patsy wanted her to stay that way. It made her nervous to pick her up or have to do something for her, convinced she was going to do it wrong.

The door opened and Penny, one of the helpers stuck her head in.

'Phone call for you Patsy,' she said. 'Someone called Darius Whitby.'

Patsy had to think for a moment, then she remembered it was the agent that Pamela, her editor at Nova had recommended. She got up and went out into the hall, nervous to speak to this man - she still didn't really know what she was doing.

'Hello?' she whispered.

'Hello is that Patsy Keegan?'

'Yes.'

'Hello my name is Darius Whitby, Pamela Bryan has recommended you to me. I was wondering if we could meet.'

'You want to come to my house?'

‘I don’t think a women’s refuge is exactly the place to conduct a business meeting. I was thinking of Donaghues, tomorrow, say twelve o’clock?’

‘What’s Donaghues?’

‘It’s a private member’s club I belong to. It’s on the Strand, number eleven.’

‘O-Okay.’ She was terrified at the thought of going out. What if Jimmy was around?

‘I’ll call Pamela and tell her it’s on. See you tomorrow Patsy. I loved the book by the way.’

‘Thank you.’

Patsy put the phone down and went back into the lounge, where Sasha was still fast asleep. She wondered if her daughter truly loved her. If she did, surely she would miss her and cry when she left the room. She was convinced Sasha hated her, even though she was only five months old

‘Could you keep an eye on Sasha tomorrow afternoon?’ she asked Gloria. ‘I’ve got to go and meet my agent.’

‘Ooh get you and your agent,’ Gloria laughed. ‘Course I can darling. She’ll be fine with me.’

Patsy slept little that night. She was so nervous about meeting this Darius Whitby. What would he think of her when he saw her? She didn’t really know what authors were supposed to look like, but she guessed they weren’t supposed to look as though they’d gone ten rounds with Henry Cooper. And what if she saw Jimmy? Priory house was only ten minutes down the road from their old flat. She knew he’d be out looking for her. Even if he didn’t want to know her, he’d want to know about Sasha.

Despite what he’d done to her, occasionally Patsy would wonder if she should go back to Jimmy. Maybe now they had money things would be different. She knew it was nonsense; Jimmy would get even more angry with her controlling the purse strings. But she couldn’t help but feel a little guilty that he had a daughter he hadn’t even met. Deep down she knew her hopes that becoming a father would change him were nothing but a fantasy. The majority of the women in the home had thought the same thing, and all that had happened was that their husbands had become more violent - somehow convinced that if he didn’t control her with his fists, she’d take his child away from him.

Patsy just wished she could stop loving Jimmy. Even though he’d tried to kill her and their baby; in the dead of night, when she was alone, she would think of the good times they shared. When they’d curl up together, his arms around her, holding her tightly, protecting her from the world. She couldn’t imagine ever having that closeness with someone ever again, and no amount of money could replace the feeling of being loved.

Gloria lent her a dress to wear to go to Donaghues in. Patsy had no fancy clothes and wanted to look nice, so Gloria let her borrow an orange halter neck dress and some white sandals. Her body looked nice, but to Patsy her face still looked hideous and she wanted to hide it. Gloria did all she could to convince her she looked fine, but it wasn’t enough, and in the end Penny lent her some big sunglasses with a white frame. They were pretty garish but at least they took the attention away from her deformities.

Pamela picked her up in a taxi, and they made their way over to the Strand. Pamela could have played Jezebel Cole. She was a pretty blonde with a large bust and long legs. Today she wore just a plain blue granddad shirt and flared jeans; but she still managed to look stunning, and it just served to make Patsy feel all the more unattractive. She suddenly realised how Susan must have felt for all those years – deformed and living in the shadow of her pretty friend.

‘I chose Darius for you because he’s just finished five years at Pendleburys,’ Pamela explained en-route. ‘They’re one of the best agencies on both sides of the Atlantic and Darius was looking after some high profile clients. But he’s decided to branch out on his own. He’s young and groovy, and I think you’ll work well together.’

‘I don’t know what to say to him. What’s he supposed to do?’

‘He’ll take care of you. Negotiate the rights and royalties of your books all around the world. He takes a small percentage of what you earn, but he’ll be there to fight your corner. He started out as an editor, so he’ll be able to give you advice as well.’

‘I’m just so nervous. I feel as though I don’t know what I’m doing.’

‘You’ll be fine Patsy,’ she smiled. ‘This is the start of a whole new life for you.’

Donaghues was situated in a building above a gentleman’s outfitter on the Strand. They took a flight of stairs up to the first floor, and were met by a man in a very fancy suit. Pamela announced they were meeting with Mr Whitby and the man led them into the bar. It was a large room with lots of tables and a counter running along the other side. Patsy was used to pubs where there was music playing and loud voices shouting. This place was practically silent except for a pianist in the corner, playing very softly.

She followed along behind Pamela, weaving in and out of the tables until they reached one where a fairly young man sat. He looked very trendy in a tight denim shirt and flared jeans; his dark hair was swept back and it complimented his thick sideburns.

‘Darius,’ Pamela said, kissing him on both cheeks. ‘How lovely to see you.’

‘Gorgeous as ever Pamela,’ he smiled.

‘Darius, this is Patsy Keegan,’ Pamela said. ‘Patsy, Darius Whitby.’

He offered his hand and Patsy shook it, almost feeling as though she should do a little curtsy.

‘I’m not sure we need dark glasses in here,’ Darius laughed.

‘I’d prefer to keep them on,’ she whispered, blushing deeply.

‘Okay, if you insist. Now, how about some champagne to celebrate our new star?’

‘Sounds wonderful,’ Pamela fizzed.

Darius just had to click his fingers and a waiter came over. He ordered a bottle of Krug and three glasses. Patsy loved champagne. Clients had bought it for her before, and she loved the

way it made her get drunk quickly. Maybe this meeting would be a bit easier if she had alcohol in her system.

‘You’re a talented writer Patsy,’ Darius said. ‘Have you been writing long?’

‘Since I was a child.’

‘And is Jezebel Cole based on anyone in particular?’

‘No. When I was little, I used to dream about being this girl called Jessica Cole, and would write stories about her. When I was pregnant for Sasha and living in the home, I decided to write about her again, but this time called her Jezebel and made her a bad girl.’

‘She’s a wonderful character. Very real. Books like this are the future Patsy. Women are becoming liberated; they want to read about other women who are doing whatever they like, using men and making money. Fabulous.’

‘It’s not too rude?’

‘Oh no. You’re going to be up there with Jackie Collins and Molly Parkin. Smut is great.’

‘Darius and I were discussing you writing another Jezebel book,’ Pamela said. ‘Maybe making a series of them. What do you think?’

‘Sounds great. I can’t believe I’m going to be paid for doing something I love.’

‘You deserve it. Talent like yours is rare.’

The champagne arrived. The waiter opened it with a gentle pop and poured three glasses, leaving the remainder in the ice bucket. Patsy drank her glass down rather too quickly – aware that her hand was shaking.

‘The only problem is your name and your image,’ Darius said. ‘It would be nice to have a photograph of you on the cover, but unfortunately your injuries will make that impossible. But I do think we should play on the fact you’re only twenty - that makes it all the more exciting.’

‘I don’t want anyone to know I was living in a women’s refuge,’ she said, taking the liberty of pouring herself another glass of champagne. ‘My ex-boyfriend is dangerous and I don’t want him knowing where me or my daughter are.’

‘Well that’s why I think we need to give you a name change too. I don’t like Patsy, it sounds too common. I was thinking of either Patricia or Patty.’

‘I like Patty. My mum used to call me Patricia when she was cross with me.’

‘Okay,’ he smiled. ‘Patty....What can we give you as a surname?’

Patsy thought hard. There were millions of surnames out there, but she wanted something personal to her. She did think of Talbot, after her old road; but that place held too many bad memories. Her mind then naturally drifted to the grotty little room she’d shared with Susan in Battersea. It may have been a bit dank and she’d made her living working as a tart, but it had

been fun. For those couple of years she'd been a carefree young girl - something she felt she'd never be again.

'Belleville,' she announced.

'I beg your pardon.'

'I want to be called Patty Belleville. I used to live in Belleville Road in Battersea.'

'Belleville,' Darius nodded. 'I like it. It's got a French feel about it.'

'We like to put an author bio in the sleeve of the book,' Pamela said. 'Given Patsy's circumstances what should we put?'

'We'll just say she was born in London and created the character of Jessica Cole when she was a child. But after a wild youth, she decided to base the character of Jezebel on all the exciting people she'd met on the nightclub scene. It makes Patsy sound exotic and interesting.'

The champagne was rapidly making Patsy tipsy, and she was fizzing with excitement. All her life she'd dreamt of becoming someone else and at last it was happening. She was being given the chance to reinvent herself; shed the skin of that cursed girl who'd led such a miserable life.

'Well I'll have a contract drawn up for you Patsy,' Darius said. 'Then I'll give you a ring and we'll arrange a time for you to come in and sign it.'

'Will I have to give interviews and things?'

'Yes, but we'll make sure you're never photographed.'

'Am I that ugly?' she cried.

'Of course you're not,' Pamela said quickly. 'We need to protect your identity, that's all.'

'And your books are very glamorous,' Darius added. 'Unfortunately, you don't have a glamorous image. But it's not a problem. There can be an air of mystery about you.'

The champagne was soon finished (most of it drunk by Patsy), and Darius announced he had to leave. Patsy felt drunk and happy and glad to be away from Priory House and Sasha. Part of her felt guilty for feeling this way, but she was convinced Sasha was better off without her. She seemed to prefer being with Gloria anyway.

They headed for the door, past the bar, Patsy telling Pamela she was fine to go home by herself. But before she could leave, she was stopped by a hand upon her shoulder.

'Patsy?' someone asked.

She looked around, for a moment she didn't recognise the tanned, handsome young man with the swept back blonde hair and fancy suit. But there was something familiar about the cornflower blue eyes and the cheeky smile. Paul. It was Paul, the policeman she'd lost her virginity to.

'What are you doing here?' she asked.

‘I could ask the same of you,’ he smiled.

Patsy couldn’t resist catching up with him. She owed so much to him. If he hadn’t warned her that the police were going to shut down the brothel, she’d never have had the chance to escape, and would have ended up in prison like her mother. She looked at Pamela and Darius, and told them she would be staying. They left and she sat on the stool next to Paul. He asked the barman for a glass, and poured her some of the red wine he was drinking.

‘What happened to your face?’ he asked.

‘My boyfriend beat me up,’ she replied.

‘What a bastard. Why did he do that?’

‘I don’t want to talk about it. What about you? Are you undercover or something?’

‘Undercover? Oh God no. I left the Met in 73; as soon as I met Jeremy.’

‘Jeremy?’

‘Jeremy Defoe, he’s an antiques dealer. Rich as Midas. The spitting image of Bryan Ferry. I can’t believe my luck Patsy. I’m helping him run his shop in Mayfair and we live in the most beautiful house on Gloucester Road.’

‘That’s fantastic. Well I’ve some good news too. I’ve sold one of my novels for ten thousand pounds.’

‘Ten thousand pounds!’ he exclaimed. ‘You’re rich. Come on, let’s find a more comfy seat and you can tell me all about it.’

They found a sofa in the corner of the room; and as Jeremy was a valued member of Donaghues, Paul had become a member by proxy. The waiters jumped to his every command and brought over a steady stream of expensive wines. Patsy got so drunk she even took her sunglasses off, not caring who saw her. She told Paul everything that had happened to her since she’d last seen him, and it felt so good to be talking to someone from her past, but who was also part of her new decadent lifestyle. Paul wowed her with his tales of sailing round the South of France with Jeremy and their rich friends. They’d even stayed with the Kennedy family over in America, after selling some antiques to them. Jeremy was also an acquaintance of Princess Margaret and had holidayed in Mustique with her. The more Patsy listened, the more she wanted all this for herself. But how could she jet around the world, looking like a monster, with a baby in tow?

‘You know you really should go and see Pierre,’ Jeremy suddenly announced. And as if he could read her thoughts, he touched her battered chin. ‘He did my nose.’

Patsy suddenly realised what it was that was different about Paul. He used to have a large, Roman nose. It was the only thing that had spoilt his face. Now it was small, perfectly-shaped and noble-looking.

‘You had a nose job?’

‘Yes, last year. Isn’t it great? Pierre fixed Jeremy’s double chin as well. You should go and see him; he’d have you sorted out in no time.’

‘I might have ten grand in the bank, but I need that to buy a flat for me and my baby.’

‘Come and live with us for a while! We’ll have a blast.’

‘Live with you?’

‘Um. We’ve got seven bedrooms. We can hire a nanny for the baby and she can take care of it, and you and me can have fun. First thing we’ll do is jet you off to Paris to have your face done. We’ll restore you to your natural beauty.’

‘Will it hurt?’

‘It’ll hurt for a bit, but think about it Patsy. Pierre will give you a new nose and chin. You’ll look gorgeous, but different. If that boyfriend of yours sees you on the telly or in a magazine, he’ll wonder if it’s you but he won’t be sure. Especially seeing as you’re going to be called Patty Belleville. You should always change your name if you’re starting a new life.’

‘It sounds tempting. And I can really live with you?’

‘Course you can. Now let’s order some more champers.’

‘I shouldn’t. I should be getting back to Sasha.’

‘She’s in a house full of women. They can look after her. Come on.’

He clicked his fingers and the waiter came over to him, bowing slightly.

‘What can I get you Mr DeVere?’ he asked.

‘I think we’ll have the Bollinger,’ Paul replied.

‘Very well.’

The waiter left and Patsy looked at Paul.

‘DeVere? I though your surname was Hartley.’

‘It was, but Jeremy thought Paul Hartley sounded too boring for an international antiques dealer. So we made up a story about me being part French and Italian and gave me a brand new identity.’

‘Paul DeVere.’

‘No Patsy. *Paolo* DeVere. I’m now known as Paolo De Vere.’

Patsy arrived back at Priory House at gone eleven p.m. After finishing up at Donaghues, Paolo had persuaded her to go to Annabels for a bop, and Patsy was so drunk she didn’t care that people were giving her strange looks. In a nightclub full of the super-rich, a little skinny girl with a battered face, wearing a Dorothy Perkins frock, stood out a mile. But Paolo knew everyone and

soon people were ignoring her features and raving about how wonderful it was that she was going to be an author. Patsy felt as though she had finally found her spiritual home.

The front doors to the home were locked, and Patsy couldn't find her key. She realised she must have dropped it in the taxi home or something and she found this funny. Giggling, she banged on the front door, shouting through the glass for someone to let her in.

Lois, Nurse Favreau's sister, was on duty tonight, and she came down the stairs, tying her belt around her housecoat, a look of disapproval upon her face. She opened the door and Patsy practically fell into her arms.

'What time do you call this Patsy?' she asked. 'You've been out for nearly twelve hours.'

'I've been meeting important people,' Patsy slurred.

'And where's your key?'

'Lost it.'

'Patsy do you realise how dangerous it is losing keys to this place? What if a husband picked it up?'

'Oh do give over, I want to go to bed. Where's Sasha?'

'In Gloria's room. I think she should stay there.'

'I agree. Now, let me get to bed.'

She started climbing the stairs, clinging onto the banister for support. Lois stood at the bottom, looking up at her.

'Patsy I think you should consider moving out,' she said. 'You can afford to buy a place of your own now.'

'I agree,' Patsy slurred. 'I'm going to stay with my rich friends. And don't call me Patsy anymore. My name's Patty Belleville.'

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Sasha left the awards ceremony as soon as she could. Daffyd assured her that Paolo was at home as he was nursing a cold, and warned her not to disturb him. Normally Sasha would have been scared of her mother's best friend, but the newfound fire within her just drove her on. Paolo knew more than he was letting on, and she wanted the truth out of him. She caught a cab over to his house in St Johns Wood, and while she was travelling, she called Phillipa.

'We must have telepathy,' Phillipa joked. 'I was just about to call you. I went over to your mother's old estate this morning. No one remembered her, but I got speaking to a middle-aged woman who works in the grocers shop there, and she had no recollection of Patty; but she did clearly remember Jimmy Lee. She used to go to primary school with him. Apparently he nearly got expelled for bashing another child round the head with a rock.'

'It seems to be his *modus operandi*. I've discovered something strange about my mother.'

'Sounds interesting.'

'I found a flight docket for an Aer Lingus flight to Dublin for November 22nd last year. I found it weird my mother travelling by a budget airline, so I asked Mrs Watson, the housekeeper what Patty was doing that weekend. She checked her diary and told me that Mum was with Paolo DeVere.'

'The antiques guy?'

'The very one.'

'I've heard an interesting rumour about him, but I'll tell you that another day. Anyway, carry on.'

'So I phoned Paolo and he said that he and Mum were in St Cere. Well today I went to an awards do and Paolo's partner was there. He made this quip about Mum having a secret lover, because of all the weekends away she's been having and using Paolo as a cover. So I asked Daffyd if Patty was with Paolo on the 22nd November and he informed me that it was his birthday and he and Paolo were in St Cere and Mum wasn't with them.'

'Intriguing. So where has she been going?'

'I don't know. I can't see Mum being discreet about a lover – whoever they were. She was brazen about everything. Anyway, what's this rumour about Paolo?'

'Well, when I was in the force, we had a lovely lady called Alice who was our typist. One day we were all chatting about Paolo, and she piped up that she was sure she used to work with him over in Notting Hill nick.'

'*Work* with him.'

'Yeah. She reckons he was a copper and he was actually called Paul Hartley. I think she was wrong though. Could you honestly imagine him arresting anyone?'

'Did you say Paul Hartley?'

‘Yes.’

‘The policeman my mother had to pretend she was sleeping with, who she became friends with; who warned her about the brothel being raided, was called Paul.’

‘You don’t think...?’

‘It’s a big coincidence. Same name. Same area. My God who is he? What’s he covering up for her?’

‘I don’t know. We should go and see him.’

‘I’m on my way there now.’

‘Okay. Well I’ll see if I can find out the names of all Aer Lingus passengers for the 22nd of November. Which airport was it?’

‘Stansted.’

‘Okay, well I have a contact. I’ll see what they can find out for me.’

As the taxi neared St Johns Wood, a horrible feeling of suspicion crept over Sasha. What if the person Patty was visiting was Jimmy? She couldn’t explain the mystery trip to Ireland; but what about the other times? Daffyd implied there were many. She recalled Patty’s last ever diary entry; how she’d just met Jimmy Lee again and he’d asked her out and how excited she was, because he was the most gorgeous boy ever. What if she’d forgiven him for beating her up and killing that girl, and was visiting him in prison? Sasha didn’t care if he was her father; he was clearly a psychopath and Patty would be in danger if she started associating with him again.

Paolo and Daffyd lived in a grand mansion close to Regents Park, and the parties they held there were legendary. Once, when Sasha was about fourteen, Patty went to a party there and didn’t come home for three days, and when she did, she was wearing someone else’s dress, and shoes that were two sizes too big, unable to explain where her own things had gone. When her mother got together with Paolo, Sasha always felt like Saffron in *Absolutely Fabulous* – the sensible teenager competing with two overgrown children.

Sasha felt like an idiot, stepping out of a taxi in the middle of the day dressed in a cocktail dress; but this couldn’t wait. Gathering her skirt, she ran up the front steps to the house, banging on the door loudly. It was soon opened by Paolo’s latest butler - who looked more like a Spanish gigolo than a member of staff.

‘Where’s Mr DeVere?’ Sasha demanded.

‘He doesn’t want to see anyone,’ the butler replied, his cut-glass accent defying his Latino looks.

‘I know he’s in, Daffyd said he was, let me in.’

The butler moved over, blocking the doorway.

‘No.’

Sasha peered over his shoulder.

‘Come out Paolo,’ she called. ‘It’s Sasha. I need to speak to you. I won’t go away....Paul.’

The butler pulled a puzzled expression and went to close the door on her; but suddenly Paolo appeared over his shoulder. His leathery face looked drained, and it was obvious he really was ill.

‘What do you want Sasha?’ he asked, his voice snuffly.

‘I need to speak to you about Patty.’

‘Alright, come in,’ he sighed. ‘That’ll be all Antonio.’

The bemused butler walked off and Paolo led Sasha into the drawing room. The curtains were closed and the TV was on. Paolo pointed the remote control at it and turned it off. He told Sasha to sit down and shut the door. She hated this room. It was a shrine to Paolo, filled with photographs of him and his celebrity friends, and shelves full of DVDs of the TV series he made in the 1990s called ‘Find it With DeVere’ - where he searched around second hand shops, trying to find antiques. It was a load of crap, but because he was so popular, the BBC regularly churned out DVDs of the best episodes

‘Why are you here Sasha?’ he asked, his bunged up nose taking some of the falseness off his voice. Sasha felt she was getting a glimpse of his real accent.

‘I bumped into Daffyd at the Art in Media Awards. He reckons Mum has some secret lover because she’s used you as a cover for lots of weekends away. He informs me it was *him* you were in St Cere with last November. Not Patty. What’s going on Paolo?’

‘Nothing’s going on. What your mother does is up to her.’

‘She’s been missing for nearly five months. It could be connected. I think you know where she is.’

‘I’ve no idea where she is and I resent you coming to my home and demanding answers off me. Please leave Sasha.’

‘Where did you first meet my mother?’ she asked, refusing to be bullied by him.

‘I don’t recall. It was when she first started writing I think.’

‘I know everything. I’ve got access to her diaries. I know all about her childhood in the brothel. How my grandmother was being blackmailed by a senior police officer, and how that same officer forced her to allow Patty, or shall I say Patsy, to sleep with a young officer who claimed to be a virgin. But in reality he was no such thing; he was gay and too scared to come out because it would ruin his career. So he and Patsy became friends, and would pretend to have sex to put people off the scent. His name was Paul and I think it’s you.’

‘You’ve a very vivid imagination Sasha,’ he said, looking away from her and fiddling with his cravat. ‘You’ve clearly inherited it from your mother.’

‘Don’t worry, I’ve no intention of telling the press the truth about you. Contrary to popular belief, the earth doesn’t revolve around you Paolo. I just want to know where my mum is.’

‘I don’t know where she is. I swear to God. She just needed to get away.’

‘No, don’t feed me that line Paolo. When mother needed to get away she’d go to Necker Island and sponge off Richard Branson, or she’d go to New York and buy half of Fifth Avenue. She didn’t leave her car at Dover and fucking disappear for five months.’

‘She had reasons, okay. Reasons she didn’t want you to know about.’

‘Is she seeing my father?’

As much as a fake tan could pale, Paolo lost all his colour. He looked at Sasha, and she could see he was struggling for words. Her blood ran cold. So her suspicions were true – Patty had gone to Jimmy.

‘What do you know about your father?’

‘That he’s a murderer called Jimmy Lee, and he’s been in prison most of my life.’

‘And he still is, thank God. I never met him, but I saw what he did to Patty. It was horrific.’

‘He beat her.’

‘Beat her! He almost killed her. Look, okay, you’re right. I am Paul Hartley. I was the first man who ever slept with your mother. Well, if you could call it that, I don’t think I even broke her in. She was beautiful, but women have never done anything like that for me. But back then the police wasn’t like how it is now. Nowadays they have Gay and Lesbian this, and Gay and Lesbian that. Back in the early Seventies, if you admitted you were gay, you’d have your head kicked in, and they’d probably find some excuse to sack you. So I went along with Roger, my superintendent, and said I’d go to see Molly’s daughter for sex. Patsy and I just hit it off straight away. Then she went away and I met Jeremy Defoe. He was rich and handsome, and I realised if I left the Met I could live how I wanted to. I met Patsy again in 1976. I was in Donaghues having a drink and she was in there meeting Darius Whitby for the first time. We got chatting and I tell you Sasha, I was horrified when I saw her face, but I never said anything.’

‘What was wrong with her face?’

‘A couple of months before you were born, your father smashed her face in with a rock. Because it was a domestic incident, no charges were brought; but Patsy went to live in a women’s refuge. While she was waiting to have you, she wrote Jezebel Cole. She tells me she never wanted anyone to see her, because she looked so ugly. Her nose was squashed and misshapen like a boxer’s, and she had a huge lump on her chin. She was upset because Darius had as good as told her she was too ugly to appear on any of her book covers, and that’s a horrible thing for a twenty year old girl to hear. So, you both moved in with Jeremy and I, and Jeremy paid for her to go and see Pierre Bertrand, his plastic surgeon in Paris; and Pierre made her into the beauty she is today.’

‘So that’s why the people I’ve been talking to, who knew her as a child say she looks so different. She had plastic surgery. That’s why I found it confusing, because I only have ever known her look how she does.’

‘Yes, because you were six months old when she had it done.’

‘So, has she seen my father?’

‘No. But she started getting letters from him. He was coming up for parole, and he kept writing to Patty, telling her he was going to find her when he got out. She wrote back and told him she wasn’t who he thought she was, but he wouldn’t take no for an answer. He then kept asking her if you were his, and by then she was really scared. She just wanted to get away for a bit - away from the pressure. She showed the letters to the police and thankfully, when the parole board saw them, they declined his request, and he’s staying in prison indefinitely. That’s all I know.’

‘So Patty didn’t want to see him?’

‘Definitely not. She showed me one of the letters. He’s clearly deranged.’

‘So when she went off on these weekends away, did she say where she was going?’

‘No. She just said she needed some space, and if anyone asked where she’d been, to say she was with us.’

‘But Mum’s a multi-millionaire. Why would she fly with Aer Lingus to Dublin?’

‘I don’t know. Only Patty can answer that.’

Sasha went home and fixed herself a sandwich, before heading up for a long soak in some of her mother’s expensive bubble bath. She mulled over all what Paolo had told her, and when she thought of the type of person her father was, she felt sickened. She was glad she’d never had children with Luca - that she seemed to be infertile. Whether it was hereditary, or just a fluke, she didn’t want to take the chance on giving birth to someone like Jimmy.

After her bath, she went straight to bed, switching on the TV fixed onto the wall, and letting the images waft over her. When her mobile started to ring, she was tempted to ignore it – she’d had such a stressful day; but when she saw it was Phillipa, she decided to answer it.

‘How’s it going?’ she asked.

‘Not too bad. How did you get on with Paolo?’

‘He told me everything. He is Paul Hartley and his boyfriend was the one who paid for my mother’s plastic surgery.’

‘When did she have that?’

‘When I was six months old. Apparently my father beat her with a rock and left her with a nose like a heavyweight boxer’s, and a lump on her chin. When she met up with Paolo again he’d found a rich boyfriend who paid for Patty to be made pretty again.’

‘And the trip to Ireland?’

‘It seemed my father was writing to Patty from prison and threatening to come and see her when he was out on parole. It freaked her out and she needed some time to get her head together, so she kept taking weekends away. Paolo doesn’t know why she went to Ireland on a cheap flight; he just knows she wanted him to cover for her.’

‘Well I’ve checked the flight schedule for Aer Lingus for 22nd November and there was a Mrs Patricia Chase booked on the 10.15 flight to Dublin. Wasn’t your mother married to Jonathan Chase?’

‘Yes.’

‘She flew back on the 15.15 flight on Monday 24th.’

‘It might just be a coincidence. I’m scared Phillipa. Jimmy was refused parole; but what if he’s got contacts on the outside? Perhaps he’s paid someone to kill my mother.’

‘I doubt it, but I think you should tell your liaison officer, just to be on the safe side. I thought I’d also let you know that I’ve got a contact in the Census office, and I looked for your grandmother. There were several Molly Keegans, as you can imagine. But I found one in 1981; she’s forty-eight and living in West Hampstead, which is pretty close to where Patty comes from, but maybe a bit affluent for an ex-prostitute. But she was the only one close to the age your grandmother must have been.’

‘Molly was born in 1933, I read it in Mum’s diary. There’s an entry when it’s Molly’s thirty-sixth birthday and she’s freaking out because she’s nearly forty.’

‘That makes sense then. This Molly Keegan was forty-eight in 1981. She was living alone in a flat in West Hampstead. By 1991, she was gone and there were no Molly Keegans of that age group in London.’

‘I guess she could be dead.’

‘Would you like me to check the Public Records Office?’

‘Would you? Thank you?’

‘On a lighter note. I saw my dirty stop out of a friend leaving your house in the papers,’ Phillipa laughed. ‘I take it the two of you got it on?’

‘You wouldn’t believe me if I told you nothing happened would you?’

‘No.’

‘Well it didn’t. I was too drunk, and Seth was a total gentleman. But he has asked me to dinner on Saturday and I accepted.’

‘Good for you. He’s a diamond.’

‘Trouble is, Luca’s now accusing me of having an affair and is threatening to withdraw his offer of ten million.’

‘Ten million? Is that how much he was offering you?’

‘Yes. I know it sounds a lot, but he’s worth about sixty million, so it’s not even a quarter of his wealth. I know we didn’t have any kids, but I did help bring Kylie up.’

‘You need to see a solicitor about it. Especially seeing as he was the one who kicked you out in the first place.’

Leaving the house the following morning, Sasha was convinced everyone was looking at her. The interview with the Daily Crucible was out today and she got it in her head that people would be talking about her; calling her a bitch for telling all about Luca. It was bad enough that he was being dropped by Sutton Town, let alone her now rubbing his face in it. She’d done the interview while she was in a temper, but now she felt rather foolish and wished she’d not aired her dirty linen in public.

She went to see Henry McGregor at his chambers in Theobalds Road. He had been Patty’s solicitor for as long as Sasha could remember and had negotiated a very handsome divorce settlement when she broke up with Jonathan Chase. Jonathan had wanted half of Patty’s fortune, and instead McGregor wangled it that Jonathan paid Patty a considerable amount of money each month for Rorie, and Patty held onto her own money. McGregor was a rare acquaintance of Patty’s in that he didn’t treat Sasha like something that was stuck on the sole of his shoe, and promised to help her as much as he could. His view was that while it had only been a verbal agreement between her and Luca that he would give her ten million pounds, there was no evidence she’d had a sexual encounter with Seth Cohen, but there was every proof Luca had been unfaithful to her as Melanie was expecting his baby.

Sasha left McGregor’s office feeling a lot more positive than she had in a long time, and wondered what she would do if she did get ten million pounds. She liked the thought of moving abroad. She loved New York and thought about buying a penthouse apartment. She also considered setting up a home for battered women. After all, she’d been born in such a place, and if they hadn’t offered Patty somewhere safe to stay, Jimmy would probably have killed them both.

She checked her mobile; there were several messages from Luca shouting at her and calling her a bitch. There was also one from Melanie, saying pretty much the same thing; complaining because Sasha had referred to her as a blonde bimbo. How else was she supposed to describe her? There was also one from Kylie, asking if she could see her. Surely Kylie didn’t want to give her a dressing down too? Okay, she was slagging her father off in public but he deserved it.

Getting into her car, Sasha phoned Kylie on her mobile. She caught her just coming out of a lecture.

‘Is this about your dad?’ Sasha asked. ‘Because I didn’t mean to embarrass you.’

‘It’s nothing to do with dad. I just wanted to see you. I’ve got Friday free, I was wondering if I could come up to London?’

‘Of course you can darling,’ Sasha smiled, excited at the thought of seeing her beloved step-daughter. ‘You can see me anytime.’

‘Okay. I’ll drive up to Patty’s house. I’ll probably get there about lunchtime.’

‘Fine. Will you be staying?’

‘Could I?’

‘Of course you can. Stay as long as you like; we’ve plenty of room.’

Sasha got home to find Mrs Watson in the kitchen, supervising Mai Tan, the Taiwanese cleaner who came in three times a week. Sasha never understood why Mrs Watson couldn’t do the cleaning herself.

‘Will you be wanting lunch?’ she asked Sasha, her tone implying that she hoped she’d say no.

‘A sandwich will do thanks,’ Sasha replied, just to annoy her. ‘Cheese salad.’

‘Very well. There are some flowers in the drawing room for you.’

‘Flowers?’

‘They were delivered this morning.’

Sasha felt a little frisson of excitement. She could only think they were from Seth. It had been a long time since a man sent her flowers. She rushed up to the drawing room and indeed, laying upon the coffee table was a beautiful bouquet of flowers in creams, purples and yellows. Their smell filled the room and Sasha shivered with anticipation, wondering what Seth had to say for himself. Finding the card, she ripped open the little envelope and almost dropped it when she read;

Well done on finally finding your backbone. Read the interview in the Crucible. So proud of you. Mum

Sasha began to shake from head to toe. A thousand thoughts ran through her mind. This was Luca’s idea of a sick joke. This was Melanie’s idea of a sick joke. It was Jimmy - maybe he’d ordered them from prison. She looked on the back of the card, trying to find an address for the florist, but it was sent via Le Fleur, an internet-based company. Sasha ran down to the kitchen where Mrs Watson was making her sandwich.

‘Who delivered those flowers?’ she asked.

‘A young man on a motorcycle.’

‘Where was he from?’

‘How should I know? All these foreigners sound the same to me.’

‘No, I mean what company?’

‘He didn’t say.’

Sasha turned and ran back into the living room. She called Directory Enquiries and got the number for Le Fleur, trying to still her shaking hands as she held the receiver, and waited for the call to be connected. After pressing a hundred buttons, she was finally put through to Customer Services and a young woman called Sophie. Sasha asked her who had ordered her flowers; Sophie told her there would be a sticker on the inside of the plastic and a serial number. Sasha read this out to her and Sophie tapped it into the computer.

‘The order was made by a Mrs Patricia Chase this morning at nine fifty two.’

‘P-Patricia Chase?’

‘Yes.’

‘Where was the order made from?’

‘I don’t have that information I’m afraid. I only have the name and the card details.’

‘I-I see. Well thank you very much.’

Sasha put down the phone and sat staring into space. Her mother was alive and she was making contact. But where was she? The article would be on the on-line edition of The Crucible, so Patty could have read it from anywhere in the world. She had to phone Phillipa and let her know that whatever had happened, at least Jimmy hadn’t paid to have Patty killed.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

November 1980

Patty was returning from Los Angeles a superstar. She'd gone out to Hollywood to oversee the filming of the movie version of *The True Tale of Jezebel Cole*, and had had the time of her life. The book had taken the world by storm and many young actresses had queued up to play the lead part – Farrah Fawcett, Cybil Shepherd, Kathleen Turner; they were all battling to star in what would be a very controversial film. In the end, Universal had plumped for an unknown British actress called Charmain Chase. She was blonde and pretty and more to the point, English and Patty liked the thought of her heroine remaining true to her roots. Most people thought Charmain had only got the part because her brother was the actor Jonathan Chase. He had played a baddie in *The Spy Who Loved Me*, and his good looks and cut-glass English accent had made the Americans fall at his feet. Now everyone concluded his little sister was benefiting from it.

Jonathan had visited the set to see how Charmaine was getting on, and he and Patty had hit it off immediately. He was probably the most gorgeous man she'd ever seen. With his ash blonde hair and light blue eyes, he was how she imagined William would look now he was a man. Jonathan was also charming and funny, and it turned her head when she found out his grandfather on his mother's side had been a Baronet. Ever ambitious, Patty loved the idea of joining the aristocracy. So when, after three cocaine fuelled weeks together, Jonathan had proposed, she'd accepted. They'd jetted to Las Vegas and married, with two strangers as witnesses, and a guy dressed as Elvis overseeing the event.

They arrived back at Heathrow to be met with a sea of flashbulbs and journalists throwing questions at them. Patty smiled and enjoyed the attention, but at the same time wanted to get home to Sasha. She felt guilty that she hadn't seen her daughter for almost three months. She could have taken her with her to LA, but guessed it would be no environment for a child, and Sasha was better off back home with the nanny - but that didn't stop her feeling like a bad mother.

In the May of that year, Patty had made her first million, and had bought herself a huge, white, ten bedroom mansion on Kensington Church Street. It made her head spin to know it was less than two miles from Talbot Road. She no longer even thought of herself as Patsy. The moment she'd left Priory House and moved into Paolo and Jeremy's place, she'd shed the skin of her former self; and by the time Pierre Bertrand had done his work and made her even prettier than she'd been before Jimmy beat her, the only thing she had to remind her of her old life was Sasha.

Patty loved her four year old daughter more than anything, but there was something about Sasha - a sort of clinginess, that reminded her of herself as a child. She'd told Edith, the nanny to enrol Sasha at Beaton's - the area's most expensive nursery; but Edith had had to take her out of there, because she was crying and refusing to mix with the other children. Even now Patty could remember Molly having to come up to the Infants school because Patsy was too shy to play with the other kids and the teachers were worried about her.

Patty didn't want her child to be a replica of her. She didn't want Sasha to be walked over and manipulated, clinging to any port in a storm, as she had. She wanted her daughter to be gutsy and

ballsy and make her mark on the world. If she was tough, then no one could hurt her. To make her more independent, Patsy had gone out of her way to ignore Sasha; even though there were days when all she wanted to do was hold her child to her and tell her how much she adored her.

It was great returning home with a husband in tow, even though Jonathan could only stay for a few weeks before jetting back off to Hollywood to make his new film. He thought Sasha was adorable and played with her for ages, before the nanny took her off to bed. Patty then dragged *him* off to bed to make up for the honeymoon they didn't have. She finally fell asleep in the early hours, saying a silent prayer to God, thanking him that her life had finally gone right.

She was awoken by the sound of the phone ringing. Delirious, she opened her eyes and saw the room was light and that Jonathan was gone. Wincing at the freezing cold air, she groped about for the receiver, and answered it with a yawn.

'Hello.'

'Welcome back Patty.' It was Delores, the receptionist at Nova Publishing. Her Kiwi accent made her instantly recognisable. 'Congratulations on the wedding.'

'Thank you,' Patty replied, wondering why she was making small talk with an office girl.

'I'm sorry to trouble you, but there's a lady here who wants to see you. She won't leave and is creating a bit of a fuss. She reckons she's your mother.'

Patsy's blood ran cold. She hadn't spoken to or heard from Molly since the day she left the brothel, and she didn't want to now, either. Between them, she, Darius and Nova had concocted a back-story for her. She was now the daughter of a rich English woman and a black jazz musician. Her mother had disowned her at sixteen, and she'd had to make her own way in the world – a bit like Jezebel Cole;, but not enough for anyone to ever guess she really had been a prostitute.

'What's her name?'

'Molly. I think she's a bit drunk to be honest. Do you want me to call the police?'

Patty had to make a decision and quick. If she let them call the police, Molly would be arrested and end up in prison again. Maybe if she just saw her she could tell her to go away.

'She's probably a disillusioned fan,' she said. 'I'll come and see her. Just put her somewhere quiet and give her a cup of tea.'

'Will do.'

'Thanks Delores.'

Patty drove to Nova's headquarters in Charing Cross Road at breakneck speed. Jeremy had taught her to drive while she was living with them, and the day she passed her test, she went out and bought a brand new Jaguar. She loved driving around in it, seeing the envious looks on the faces of the people she passed. She still had to pinch herself sometimes – little Patsy Keegan, driving a Jag and living in a posh house in Kensington.

She wondered what she was going to say to Molly. The only person in her life now who knew the absolute truth about her was Paolo. People like Darius Whitby knew glimpses of the real her, and to everyone else, she was this rich girl who'd been disowned by her mother. The last thing she wanted was the world to find out her mother was a drunken whore who'd forced her into being a prostitute herself.

As she strode into the office - draped in her mink coat - everyone sat up and paid attention. She was their newest star, and the staff bent over backwards to please her. Delores ended her phone-call and painted on her most beaming smile.

'Hello Patty,' she said. 'I've put the lady in Charles' office, he isn't in today.'

'Thanks Delores.'

Patty made her way up to Charles McKay's office. He was the non-fiction editor, and notorious for his fastidiousness. Patty hoped Molly hadn't been sick or knocked something over. Patty may have been Nova Publishing's favourite person, but Charles wouldn't appreciate something like that.

She took a deep breath before stepping into the office. The only member of her family Patty ever wanted to see again was Sasha. She didn't want anyone else from her past spoiling her exciting new life.

Opening the door, she realised she could smell Molly before seeing her. She was seated behind Charles' desk, looking through a book. She looked up and Patty did a double take. Her mother looked different. The red hair was gone, and instead, a shock of grey curls framed her face, and Patty suddenly realised that Molly had probably been grey for years. That orange hair had never looked natural, but in her line of work she'd had to make herself look as young as possible. She wore no make up, and was wrapped up in a shabby, grey overcoat. The old Molly wouldn't have been seen dead in something like that.

'Patsy,' she smiled, getting up and walking towards her daughter with open arms. 'Look at you, you're so beautiful.'

'Sit down Mum. You stink.'

Molly sat down on the chair on one side of the desk, and Patty went round to the other side. She had to keep a distance between them. She couldn't allow Molly to embrace her. What if someone walked in?

'What have you done to your face Patricia? You look different.'

'My boyfriend beat me up. I had to have plastic surgery. What do you want Mum?'

'To see you. I haven't seen you in eight years. I read an interview with you in Woman's Own. You've got a baby.'

'Yes, Sasha. I don't want you near her.'

The smile dropped from Molly's face and her head hung low. A part of Patty felt guilty for being so harsh; but Molly had ruined her life - she wasn't going to do the same to Sasha.

'Have you got a picture of her?' Molly asked quietly.

'Not on me, no. Mum you can't come here, looking for me. No one knows about you. No one knows about my past and I want it to stay that way.'

'You're ashamed of me.'

'And why shouldn't I be?' She lowered her voice. 'You sold my virginity when I was fifteen years old.'

'Don't play the innocent Patricia,' Molly hissed. 'Don't you think I knew all about you and your little tricks when my back was turned? You were whoring yourself out and taking all the money. You're lucky Roger didn't find out, he would have killed you.'

'You can't see it can you? I should never have been in that position in the first place. If I never wrote another book and lost all my money, I'd rather go out and scrub people's floors to support Sasha, than sell myself again. I want Sasha to grow up innocent, to find out about men when she's older, so she can make up her own mind. I never had the chance.'

'Do you think I didn't try and go out scrubbing floors when your dad died? Course I did. But whenever I couldn't find someone to look after you, I'd have to take you with me. Have you ever tried turning up to some posh woman's fancy house with a black baby in tow? I was pushed out without even being given my wages. I could have put you in care but I didn't. I kept you because I loved you. I'm sorry I couldn't give you a palace in Kensington to live in, but I did the best I could.'

Patty knew she couldn't argue with this. She'd never had to struggle financially with Sasha and yet there were still times she found it hard to cope, and couldn't imagine what her mother had gone through. But that still didn't mean she wanted her to be part of her life.

'Where are you living?' she asked.

'In a women's hostel in Camden. It's awful Patsy. All my clothes got stolen. Look at this horrible coat. I wouldn't buy something like this.'

'Okay, okay. How about I buy you a nice flat somewhere, anywhere you like. I'll give you two thousand pounds a year to live on and it's up to you if you want to spend it on drink or actually take care of yourself. But you must promise me that you'll never tell anyone you're my mother. If the police found out I used to be a prostitute they might try and take Sasha off me.'

'Okay okay. But please let me at least have a photo of my grand-daughter.'

'Alright. You can have a photo of her, but if anyone comes to your house, you don't tell them who she is.'

Molly wiped away a tear.

'Thank you Patsy. I don't deserve your kindness.'

‘And I’m not Patsy anymore. I’m Patty.’

‘Where’s Sasha’s dad?’

‘Prison. He murdered a girl a couple of years ago. He thought she was me and he caved her head in with a brick.’

‘But you’ve got a new husband now. I saw you and him in the papers.’

‘Yes, Jonathan’s a lot different to Jimmy. Now you’d better be going Mum. I’ll get Delores to call you a cab.’

‘Perhaps we could go and look at flats sometime.’

‘No, not together. Look, where would you like to live?’

‘Well I used to walk you all the way to West Hampstead in your pram when you were a baby. It was such a pretty area. Maybe West Hampstead would be nice.’

‘Okay, I’ll look for a flat in West Hampstead for you and we’ll go from there. Do you have a number for the hostel?’

‘Yeah. Can I write it down?’

Patty passed her a piece of paper and a pen from Charles’ desk. Molly wrote the number down slowly and carefully; and Patty remembered that her mother had problems with her reading and writing. She used to always get the girls in the home to help with Patsy’s homework.

‘You’re a kind girl,’ she said, passing it to Patty. ‘You could have pushed me out onto the street.’

‘I would never do that; but this must be the last time we see each other. I’ll always make sure you’re looked after but no one must know you’re my mother.’

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Sasha felt as though she was going out of her mind. Her mother was out there somewhere; had been cruel enough to send these flowers, and yet wouldn't tell her where she was. Phillipa had been to the Public Records office and couldn't find a death certificate for Molly Keegan, so Sasha presumed her grandmother was still alive as well. It seemed everyone was out there; her mother, her father, her grandmother and she yet couldn't see any of them.

She decided to take her mind off her woes by preparing the spare bedroom next to her own - ready for Kylie's arrival. It was more like a suite than a bedroom, with a small living area and its own bathroom. Ivanna Trump came to stay here once, and prior to her arrival, Patty had had the room redecorated in golds and creams. It was totally over the top - the walls covered in airbrushed photographs of herself - and it was hardly suited to an eighteen year old girl; but Sasha wanted her stepdaughter near her. It seemed like such a long time since she'd seen her.

Little had to be done except to remove all of Patty's fur coats from one of the wardrobes. All three daughters had had arguments with their mother over her love of fur, but she wore it regardless. Kylie in particular didn't like it, and Sasha knew if she opened the wardrobe, she would freak out at being presented with a selection of dead animals. Sasha didn't really like touching them herself; but gritted her teeth and threw them onto the bed. There were thirty coats in total that, if sold, would raise enough money to save a whole jungle full of animals.

Once the wardrobe was empty, Sasha went to close it, but something caught her eye. A very old-looking handbag was stuffed to one side. It wasn't like Patty to hide one of her bags away. Her walk in wardrobe upstairs had a whole section devoted to bags. It was possible she'd come in drunk one night and had just thrown her coat and bag into the wardrobe, but this was unlikely - Patty usually just left things on the floor for Mrs Watson to pick up.

Bending down, Sasha pulled out the bag and found it was an old fashioned Fendi tote. It was zipped up, but bulging - clearly filled with things. Curious, Sasha sat down upon the bed amongst the coats, and opened the bag up. On the surface it looked to be full of till receipts and general rubbish, but as she tipped everything out onto the bed, she could see there were letters and photographs, and a newspaper cutting. It was this that Sasha opened up first, and she discovered it was a cutting detailing her father's trial. Instead of the usual mug shot of Jimmy, this was accompanied by a snapshot. He looked so of the day, in his tight t-shirt, flared jeans and platform boots. He leaned against a wall, arms folded, posing. He was very good-looking, and Sasha wondered if it saddened Patty that things had worked out so horribly. Why else would she keep this one solitary news clipping?

She picked up a yellowing, folded document, and opened it out. It was a birth certificate. Her mother's birth certificate. It listed her name as Patricia Ann Keegan and her date of birth as 10th June 1956. At least she hadn't changed that along with the rest of her identity. Her mother was listed as Molly Louise Keegan, her father as Augustus Riley and his occupation was a 'Driver'. Sasha found it strange, how back years ago, illegitimate children took their mother's name rather than their father's. Although she now realised why Patty had chosen to call her Sasha Keegan, rather than Lee - that could have been far too dangerous.

She picked up a photograph. It was in black and white and of a chubby looking baby dressed in a white, woollen outfit. It looked pretty old and Sasha knew it wasn't her mother - the baby was white. She turned it over and written on the back it said '*Colm Murphy aged 9 months.*' Sasha wondered who the hell Colm Murphy was. She'd never even heard the name before. There was another photograph. It was colour, but had faded so badly, the subject could barely be seen. It looked like a very tall man wearing 1970s clothing, leaning on the shoulder of a much shorter, older man. On the back of that was written '*Colm with Da – Dublin 1974*'. Sasha could only conclude this was Molly's brother. The way he'd written 'Da', was as if it would mean something to both of them. But why was he called Murphy and she Keegan? Sasha could only conclude that her grandmother had married before she met Augustus and her maiden name was Murphy.

Amongst the rubble was a badly folded piece of paper and when she opened it up, she saw it was a photocopy of a birth certificate. She thought it was just a copy of her mother's until she noticed the crest at the top was different. It was a harp – Ireland. This was an Irish birth certificate. Scanning down, she saw it was for the City of Dublin and dated 31st May 1948. The name of the person was *Colm Patrick Keegan*, the place of birth was '*St Mary's Convent, Dublin*'. The father was unknown, the mother was listed as '*Molly Louise Keegan*', and under her occupation it said '*Schoolgirl*'. Sasha almost dropped it in shock. She had an uncle. Molly had had another baby before coming to England and having Patty. And Patty clearly knew about it!

There was a piece of folded blue paper, which was obviously a letter. Sasha opened it up. The handwriting was sloping and hard to read and she had to squint to make sense of it

Mr. Colm Murphy

31 Keane Road

Drumcondra

Dublin 9

Republic of Ireland

13th July 1999

Dear Miss Belleville

I am writing to you, to let you know of the happiness I have felt since finding out I was your brother. My name is Colm Murphy and I was born on 31st May 1948 to our mother Molly Keegan. I was adopted by Richard and Siobhan Murphy on 4th August 1948 and spent many happy years with them. My dear father passed in 1988 and my mother passed in 1997, and it was then that I decided to look for my real mother. I found it to be Molly Keegan who was indeed living not 5 miles away from me in Donnycarney. It filled my heart with joy to be reunited with my mother and could not believe it when she told me you were my sister. She explained everything to me, the whole story, and I understand you do not want any contact with her, except for the nice house you bought for her in Donnycarney. But I wanted you to know you have a

brother in Ireland and if you can spare it in your heart to forgive your mother for her past sins, I would love you to visit.

Forever your brother

Colm Murphy

Sasha read it and re-read it, to reassure herself she wasn't dreaming. She had an uncle. Patty was still in touch with Molly - she'd even bought her a house! All these things had happened and her mother had never thought to tell her. Patty could be so selfish at times. She had no sense of family. Sasha doubted she'd even shared any of this with Rorie or Dana. It was as though her life was completely separate to theirs.

She wondered if Patty had had a change of heart and had gone to visit her brother and mother. It would certainly account for the Aer Lingus ticket and the sighting of her just outside of Dublin. Sasha couldn't understand why her mother would fake a disappearance just to do this, but then again Patty did like her secrets.

Sasha's mobile started to ring and she dug it out of her jeans pocket. It was Phillipa.

'How's it going?' she asked.

'I was going to ring you. I think I might know where my mother's gone.'

'Oh yes, where?'

'I've discovered a secret stash of letters. It seems I have an uncle living in Ireland. My grandmother had a baby when she was fifteen and he was adopted. But he tracked Molly down a few years ago and wrote to Patty telling her he was her brother. The way it reads, Mum brought my grandmother a house in Ireland but didn't want to know her in any other way. But the Aer Lingus ticket and the sighting in Ireland makes me think that's where she's gone.'

'Fantastic. I was wondering if you could pop over to see me anyway.'

'Oh yeah, what's up?'

'I've been in Dover all day, talking to the various companies that are based there. I have to confess I used my best flirtation techniques on the owner of a taxi rank, as he was the only person who kept CCTV tapes for more than a few weeks. He has CCTV footage of the day Patty left, and we've got some interesting images.'

'What of?'

'A young girl pulling up in Patty's car, dumping it and walking off.'

'A young girl?'

'Yep. Come on over and have a look.'

'What does she look like?'

‘Slim, dark hair.’

‘Could be anyone. Okay, I’ll come over.’

Sasha felt that everything was rushing up to smack her in the face. It was all so very overwhelming and she couldn’t believe Patty had kept so many secrets from her. Now for the first time she would see who had dumped her mother’s car that day. She wondered how come the police hadn’t picked up on this CCTV footage – they’d assured her they’d looked at everything when Patty had gone missing.

Phillipa greeted her with her usual chirpiness, and Sasha wished she could be as upbeat. Everything looked so bloody complicated and miserable from where she was standing, that it was difficult to even crack a smile.

‘How come the police never found out about this footage?’ she asked Phillipa as they made their way up to her office.

‘Well I’m guessing Mr Mashood, the owner of the firm, doesn’t want the police to know why he keeps the footage.’

‘And why’s that?’

‘I couldn’t possibly tell you.’ Phillipa flopped down on the chair in front of her desk. ‘It’s all very illegal.’

‘Tell me, please.’

‘Okay. You must keep this a secret. But he sort of fell into it himself. I could see his camera was practically pointed to the place where Patty left her car. So I told him I was looking for someone and he asked me if I was sure they hadn’t turned up. I wasn’t sure what he meant so he repeated himself, asking me if they were coming to work for me. Something in my mind clicked and I got the feeling it was concerning illegal immigrants, so I played along and said yes. I said I was expecting someone who was coming to work for me, and he then told me to look at the footage because there was a chance they’d arrived, got a better offer from someone else and legged it with them. Turns out this guy uses his taxis to ferry illegals into the UK and he keeps the CCTV in case the people who are expecting them at this end want to check if they got here. I used my feminine wiles and told him my employer would want to see proof so he burned me a copy of the disk there and then.’

She turned to her computer and moved the mouse so the screen came back on. She pressed play on Windows Media Player and the picture came to life. It clearly showed the X-type Jaguar Patty used to ferry herself round town, pulling up near the gated area of the Dock. It came to a stop and the driver’s door opened. A young girl got out and when Sasha saw who it was, she almost fainted with shock. There was no denying it - the long dark hair, the distinctive bright green trainers. The young woman closed the car door and walked away, out of shot.

‘Any idea who it is?’ Phillipa asked.

‘Yes,’ Sasha replied quietly. ‘It’s Kylie, my step-daughter.’

CHAPTER TWENTY

February 2008

Patty was trying to write, but the words just wouldn't come into her head. Nova were pressing her for the latest instalment of Jezebel Cole and all she'd managed to write were two thousand words. She already had the outline; Jezebel wanted to pass a bill legalising brothels and was blackmailing an MP she was seeing into letting her take his place as a parliamentary candidate, so she could run for election. It was all getting so tiresome. Jezebel Cole was now fifty years old and yet she was getting up to the same tricks she was doing at twenty. She was a year younger than Patty, and yet life to her was about hot flushes, aching joints and low self-esteem; not hot sex, toyboys and breaking the law.

The menopause was hitting Patty hard. All her friends were on HRT and would crow about its benefits. Patty wasn't so fortunate. She'd gone back on the pill after having Dana and had developed migraines. It was just something she coped with each month, but when she started missing periods and feeling ill, she'd gone to her doctor, demanding HRT, only to be told that the fact the contraceptive pill gave her migraines meant she was at high risk of having a stroke, and therefore she couldn't take it. Devastated, Patty had sought second, third and fourth opinions and all had said the same thing. Her friend Elise Hopkins suggested she buy it off the net but in the end she couldn't risk it and instead took herself off to Mr Lu, her Chinese herbalist. He'd made up a concoction that helped slightly, but she was still feeling the symptoms.

Everything seemed to be going wrong for Patty. The menopause was dreadful; she had writer's block and most of all there was Jimmy. He just wouldn't leave her alone. She'd written to him, telling him she didn't want to know him, but he ignored her. He'd even sent her a Visiting Order, begging her to go and see him. She was terrified he would be granted parole and come after her. He'd killed that poor girl back in 1977 thinking she was her. What would he do if he got his hands on the real thing?

She sat at her desk, trying to get comfortable. Her size eight trousers were digging into her waist and it was horrible. Another side effect of the menopause was that she'd put a stone on in a month - even though she was hardly eating. It was all so unfair and she wished she could wave a magic wand and be thirty-five again. She just hoped none of the girls made her a grandmother any time soon - that really would be the final straw.

The only thing that cheered her up was shopping, so she decided to abandon her writing and went out instead. She got a taxi to Bond Street, and headed to the boutique belonging to Gloria Costello, her favourite designer. Her clothes were stylish and comfortable, and she would always tailor everything to Patty's exact fit. She resolved to buy things in a size ten for the first time in her life. For someone who had always been skinny, to Patty this felt like being fat. She remembered her pregnancies with Rorie and Dana - feeling so hideous and unattractive that she hated anyone to see her. It had been different with Sasha - she hadn't been in the public eye then. But with her two younger daughters, she'd hidden indoors once she got too heavy; and only re-emerged when she'd snapped back to her usual shape.

She was treated like royalty at Gloria's salon. There were endless glasses of champagne and the helpers tended to her every whim. She ended up spending close to ten thousand pounds on a

variety of daywear outfits. For evening wear she preferred higher profile designers like Valentino and Gucci.

Leaving the salon, she was embarrassed to feel that now familiar whoosh of heat rise from her feet all the way up to her head. She felt light-headed and dizzy and even though she had a layer of make up on, she was convinced people could see how red her face was. She started to shake and decided she needed coffee and a sit down before heading home. Fortunately, her favourite hotel – The Page, was nearby. It was owned by one of Paolo's friends and was the height of luxury. Patty had come to stay here when she moved out of the Kensington house, and was waiting for her new home in Chelsea to be refurbished. Dana had still been away at school back then, so Patty had lived alone in the top floor suite, paradoxically enjoying the high life, but at the same time, feeling like that vulnerable little girl stuck away in her attic room in the house in Talbot Road.

Entering the hotel, she headed for the small dining room at the back. As she passed the lifts, one of them opened and she came face to face with her step-granddaughter Kylie, accompanied by a very tall, very handsome young man who looked somehow familiar. On spotting Patty, Kylie stopped dead, all colour draining from her pretty face. She looked as though she wanted to turn and run back into the lift.

'Hello Kylie,' Patty said. 'What are you doing here?'

'You won't tell Sasha will you?' the young girl suddenly blurted out and Patty was intrigued. There was no crime in spending an afternoon with a young man in a hotel. She was only sixteen, but she knew her own mind.

'What's wrong darling?' Patty asked.

The young man looked at his watch.

'I'd better be going,' he said, leaning down and kissing Kylie on the cheek. 'I'll give you a ring.'

He walked off, leaving Kylie stranded and looking more than a little sheepish. As Patty watched him go, she realised who he was, it was Rob Gilbey the footballer. She had no idea who he played for, except England - and that he was married to Una Flaherty, the fashion model.... 'I was going in for coffee,' Patty said to Kylie. 'Would you like to join me?'

Kylie hesitated, then nodded, obviously in need of someone to talk to. They went into the small but finely decorated dining room, finding a small booth over on the far side. Kylie sat, shoulders hunched, obviously embarrassed - trying to hide her pretty face behind her long, dark hair.

'You know half the people in here are probably having affairs,' Patty laughed, after she'd ordered the coffee. 'You're not doing anything different.'

'How do you know I'm having an affair?'

'Well I can't think of any other reason why you'd look so embarrassed and ashamed.'

‘I’m frightened you’ll tell Sasha.’

‘Why should I tell Sasha? We barely talk to each other. I think I’m nothing but an embarrassment to my daughter. She wouldn’t be interested in a word I say. So, how long has it been going on?’

‘Three months. I met him at his birthday party – he plays for Sutton Town like Dad; and Una, his wife wasn’t there. We got chatting and it just went from there. If the press found out, they’d crucify me. Everyone thinks they’re so happy but she’s a complete bitch really, and she treats him like dirt.’

Patty said nothing. Many an impressionable young girl had been fed the same line by a horny married man over the years. And normally they went home to loving wives who were nothing like the haridans they painted them to be. But Kylie was young, she had to learn.

‘I’m in no position to criticise you Kylie,’ Patty sighed. ‘I’ve made some terrible decisions where men are concerned.’

‘I can’t believe that. You always seem to know exactly what you’re doing.’

‘I wasn’t born fifty-one!’ she laughed. ‘I wasn’t much older than you when I got with Sasha’s dad; and he almost killed me!’

‘You’re kidding?’

‘No.’

The coffee came and their conversation lulled. Patty wondered how much she should tell Kylie – she was very close to Sasha after all. But she felt she could trust her. The affair was obviously something Kylie didn’t want to talk to her stepmother about, so maybe this could just be something they kept between them. Patty could only pity the young girl – the world of relationships was painful and confusing, whatever age you were.

‘This is my confidence to you,’ Patty said. ‘Then if I ever breathe a word to another person about Rob, you can tell the world my secrets. I met Sasha’s dad at school, but just after he left, he almost killed a boy and went to prison. We met up a few years later and fell in love. I adored him. He looked like John Travolta and was so charming. At first I mistook his possessiveness for him just being caring and loving. But over time, the protection became control and before long I wasn’t even allowed to leave the flat without his say so. One night when I was seven months gone with Sasha, we had an argument and he beat my face to a pulp with a rock.’

‘Oh my God!’ winced Kylie.

‘I looked like I’d gone a few rounds with a heavyweight boxer for months afterwards. It was Paolo DeVere who paid for my plastic surgery. Anyway, Jimmy got away with it because it was a domestic; but I ran away from him and went to live in a women’s refuge and had Sasha. Jimmy didn’t know where I’d gone, and apparently he went out night after night looking for me. He found a young girl, mistook her for me and killed her. He’s spent the rest of his life in prison.’

‘And Sasha doesn’t know about this?’

‘No. I’ve always wanted to protect her from the truth and refused to tell her who her father is. But I’ve been really scared lately; Jimmy’s up for parole soon and he’s been writing to me, threatening to come and see me. He’s read I’ve got a thirty-two year old daughter and he realises she’s his and he’s threatened to come and see Sasha when he gets out. I’m so frightened.’

‘Have you told the police about him writing to you?’

‘No. Would they take it seriously?’

‘Of course they would. It’s not the 1970s now. If they think you’re in danger I’m sure they’ll refuse his parole.’

‘You know a lot about the law for a sixteen year old.’

Kylie laughed.

‘I watch a lot of TV! You should go to the police Patty. He can’t get away with threatening you.’

‘You know I think you’re right. I will. I never got to put him behind bars back then, I can at least keep him in prison now. But you must promise never to tell Sasha, for her own safety.’

‘I promise, and you must promise not to tell her about Rob. She’d tell my dad and he’d never speak to me again.’

‘You have my word. You know if you ever want to talk Kylie, I’m here for you. Sasha was always so secretive when she was your age, I never had the chance to give her advice or guide her in any way. Perhaps things can be different with you.’

‘Thanks Patty. You’re the only person I can talk to. I can’t tell any of my friends about Rob. I love them all dearly, but none of them can be trusted with that sort of secret.’

‘Does he say he’ll leave his wife for you?’

‘He can’t until Phoenix, their son, is older. His own dad walked out when he was five and he doesn’t want to do the same to Phoenix.’

‘You don’t have to take my advice Kylie, and you probably won’t - I remember what it’s like to be a headstrong sixteen year old. But you’re young and beautiful; there are so many men out there who’d love to be your boyfriend. If you wait for Rob, you’ll wait forever and before you know it, the best years of your life will have passed you by.’

‘It’s a chance I’m willing to take. I love him and I can’t imagine my life without him.’

The two women shared a pot of coffee and chatted some more, and Patty came to the conclusion that she really liked Kylie. She wasn’t snooty like Sasha, or a bitch like Rorie, or vacuous like Dana. She was just a very sweet, down-to-earth girl who didn’t know how to get herself out of a dreadful situation. Patty could sympathise with that.

When they left The Page, she offered Kylie the money for a taxi to take her all the way home in Epsom, but she refused. She wanted to do some shopping and was happy to get the train back.

They parted, Kylie walking up to Oxford Street and Patty getting into a taxi. She rode through the darkened streets, thinking over the conversation she'd just had. There was something so tragic and romantic about doomed love – for that was what Kylie and Rob were experiencing. He was never going to leave his wife for her, and one day Kylie would realise this and berate herself for being a fool. Patty didn't know anything about football, but she saw the newspapers and celebrity magazines, and Rob Gilbey and Una Flaherty were a brand - together they were worth millions. He wasn't going to risk losing all that over his team-mate's teenage daughter.

An idea sparked in Patty's mind. She was so bored with writing about sex, about the now middle-aged Jezebel Cole and her ridiculous exploits. She certainly didn't have the time to make up anything new, but she remembered that book she wrote for William Morton all those years ago. Looking back at it now, she cringed at her crush on him and the way she tried to declare her love; but she did recall that the book was quite good. People always enjoyed reading about forbidden lovers overcoming adversity to be together. Patty had an almost photographic memory for things she'd written, and she was pretty sure she could knock it out again in three weeks.

She called home and instructed Mrs Watson to fix her a light supper and that she would eat it in her study. She intended to work until midnight, re-writing *Two Hearts*. Maybe now at fifty-one it was time to step down from her role as Queen of Raunch and take Barbara Cartland's mantle as the 'Queen of Romance'.

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CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Sasha wasn't sure how she'd managed to hold off from calling Kylie and screaming down the phone at her. Instead she remained calm and waited for her step-daughter to arrive the following day. She was aware that Kylie and Patty had always got on well, but not enough for Kylie to be instrumental in Patty's disappearance. Sasha couldn't even begin to imagine what the set up had been. There was no connotation in her head that could possibly explain it.

Kylie arrived at half past eleven; and the moment Sasha heard the taxi pull up outside the house, she rushed to open the door, beating Mrs Watson to it. Kylie came up the steps, throwing her rucksack onto her back, smiling nervously when she saw the angry look on Sasha's face.

'Hi Sash,' she said quietly.

'Come in Kylie.'

By now, Mrs Watson was hovering over Sasha's shoulder, desperate to poke her nose in. Sasha took Kylie's rucksack and passed it to the housekeeper.

'Take this up to the spare room next to mine please Mrs Watson.'

'Certainly.'

Mrs Watson walked off rather slowly, trying to eavesdrop. Sasha took Kylie by the arm and led her into the lounge, shutting the door behind her.

'Are you okay Sash?' Kylie asked.

'Sit down.'

Kylie sat on the sofa and Sasha pointed the remote control at the TV. It came to life and the footage of Kylie driving the car, parking it and leaving it, played on screen, and Sasha watched her step-daughter's face - trying to gauge a reaction; but she didn't move, just blushed and covered her hand with her mouth.

Sasha switched the TV off and looked at her.

'Can you explain that Kylie?' she asked.

'W-Where did you get that from?'

'That's irrelevant. What's going on? Where's my mother?'

'I don't know.'

'Stop treating me as though I'm stupid Kylie. You're involved in her disappearance. Where is she?'

'I told you, I don't know.'

She suddenly burst out crying, burying her head in her hands, sobbing. For once, Sasha had no feeling for her. In fact, a part of her hated her. All this time she'd been going out of her mind,

worrying where her mother was, and Kylie had known the truth; repaying Sasha's years of devotion with silence.

'It's all gone wrong,' Kylie sobbed. 'My life stinks.'

'Oh stop the dramatics Kylie,' Sasha snapped, sitting beside her. 'Stop crying and tell me what you've done with my mother.'

Kylie turned to look at her, shock on her tear stained face.

'What do you mean done with her?'

'Are you in trouble? Have you got involved with people who've got you to do something terrible?'

'What are you talking about?'

'I got the flowers Kylie - the ones allegedly from my mother. When I did the interview with The Crucible a big bouquet arrived, allegedly from Patty. I called the company up and they said they'd been paid for with Patty's credit card. Has someone you know hurt her and stolen her cards?'

'I can't believe you're even asking me this! I've always looked on you like a mother and you're accusing me of murder.'

'Well what else am I supposed to think? My mother's disappeared; someone has her credit cards and there's CCTV footage of you dumping her car. All the evidence points to it.'

'She asked me to do it okay. She asked me.'

She started sobbing again and still Sasha couldn't comfort her. What was she talking about? Why would Patty ask her to dump her car? None of it made sense.

'Why did she ask you?'

'Because she felt she couldn't trust anyone else. She just wanted to get away and didn't want anyone to know where she'd gone, and that includes me. She didn't even tell me where she was going.'

'Since when did you and my mother become close?'

'Last year. She found something out about me and we grew closer because of that.'

'What?'

'When I broke up with Jeremy, I started seeing someone else, and Patty found out about it.'

'Who was it?'

'Rob.'

'Rob who?'

‘Rob Gilbey.’

Sasha was stunned. She knew Rob Gilbey and his wife Una really well. They always seemed so happy together. The public loved them - they were probably the second most popular football couple after Posh and Becks. Rob was very good looking – tall, dark and handsome, but he was almost twice Kylie’s age.

‘Well say something then,’ Kylie sniffed.

‘I’m shocked. I thought he and Una were happy.’

‘I don’t want to talk about it,’ Kylie wailed and started sobbing again. This time Sasha put her arm around her. For a moment she forgot the situation with Patty and felt sorry for her step-daughter. Rob Gilbey was far too old for her and shouldn’t have taken advantage of an innocent young girl.

‘How did Mum find out about it?’ she asked.

‘I bumped into her one day when Rob and I were leaving a hotel. We had a coffee and I told her everything. I didn’t have anyone else to talk to and I had to tell someone.’

‘You could have told me.’

‘No I couldn’t. You would have told Dad.’

‘Glad to hear you think so little of me Kylie.’

‘I’m sorry. I know you’re friendly with Una too. I didn’t want to put you in a horrible position. Patty seemed to understand and she opened up to me too. She told me about things that had been troubling her, like trying to write her new book, and going through the change of life.’

‘Why on earth is she worried about going through the change? Surely she’s HRT’d up to the eyeballs.’

‘She can’t take it because she could have a stroke, so she’s suffering alone. A bit like me.’

‘I don’t believe this. I know absolutely nothing about my own mother.’

‘She was also upset because she had writer’s block and...someone from her past was hassling her.’

‘My father?’

‘You knew?’

‘I spoke to one of her oldest friends and he told me.’

‘I told her to take his letters to the police and she did and they refused his parole. We kept in touch on and off over time; then back in December she told me she had to go away for quite a while and she didn’t want anyone to know where she’d gone. She honestly didn’t tell me where she was going or why. She was just really upset and needed some time alone. She reckoned no

one would worry about her if she was gone, so she said she'd tell people she was going to Paris. She asked if I could leave her car at Dover, so people would think she'd taken the ferry. So that's what I did. I know I should have told you, but Patty swore me to secrecy and she'd kept all my secrets, so I felt that I owed it to her.'

'I've been going out of my mind with worry. I've hired a private detective and everything, and all the time you knew. I'm so disappointed with you Kylie. Patty could be dead by now.'

'I don't think she was suicidal. She reckons she's coming back, just not for a few months.'

'Did she ever mention going to Ireland?'

'No. Is that where you think she is?'

'It's a suspicion. I found some letters stashed away and discovered she's got a secret brother, called Colm. My grandmother had a baby when she was fifteen, and he wrote to Patty asking to be reunited. It says in the letter that she didn't want anything to do with her mother, but I can't help but wonder if she's gone to see this Colm.'

'I'm so sorry Sasha.'

'I can't say I'm happy, Kylie. I thought we had a stronger relationship than that, but obviously not. I feel as though I need a drink. Do you want one?'

'Tea would be nice.'

'I meant something stronger.'

'No, I'd better not.'

'Why not?'

'I...' She stopped short and Sasha saw her dark eyes brim with tears once more. A horrible knot twisted in Sasha's stomach – surely she wasn't...?

'Are you pregnant Kylie?' she asked.

The young girl looked down and started crying again. Sasha sighed to herself. As if her life couldn't get any more complicated.

'Is it Rob's?'

'Yes.'

'Oh no. Does he know?'

She nodded.

'And is he going to leave Una?'

'He told me to get an abortion.'

‘And are you?’

‘I don’t know. I had one booked for yesterday but I chickened out. It’s why I wanted to see you. I need someone who’s on my side?’

‘Does your dad know?’

‘No. He’s wrapped up in Melanie and the baby. I suppose it was silly thinking you’d be on my side. I’m no better than Melanie myself am I?’

‘Don’t be silly, you’re different. Rob took advantage of you. How old were you when it started?’

‘Sixteen.’

‘He should be ashamed of himself.’

‘Do you want me to go home?’

‘No. But I am going to try and get a flight to Ireland for tomorrow. Do you want to come with me?’

‘Are you serious?’

‘Well you seem to be my mother’s confidant. I feel you should see this through to its conclusion with me.’

‘Maybe when we come back, you’d help me with the abortion. I think I could face it if I had you with me.’

She sounded so young. Sasha wondered where that pretty little girl had gone. It seemed like only yesterday she was a child herself, now she was carrying one of her own.

‘Of course I will. I’ll support you in whatever you do. But I still think you should tell your dad.’

‘When I get back. I’m not that brave yet.’

Sasha called Phillipa and told her of her plans to go to Ireland, and Phillipa surprised her by asking if she could come too. If they were barking up the wrong tree, and Patty wasn’t in Ireland, she would have to start again from scratch anyway, so felt she should keep abreast of everything that happened. Sasha then called Seth and apologised for not being able to see him the next night. She explained what was happening and as usual he was laid back and understanding. He told her to ring him as soon as she got back and they could rearrange their dinner date.

Sasha made up her mind that she definitely wanted to see Seth again. In the last few weeks her life had changed beyond recognition, and she realised that everyone around her – Luca, Kylie, Patty - all had their secrets and didn’t need her. So it was time she had some fun and found someone who wanted to be with her. It wouldn’t be anything serious, just friends, and they could see where it went from there.

By the end of that day, the three of them were booked onto the 10.10am Ryanair flight from Stansted to Dublin. They were also booked into the Holiday Inn in the City Centre, as they didn't know if this Colm would welcome them turning up on his doorstep, let alone allow them to stay. Sasha felt nervous about meeting her uncle for the first time. If he was friendly, she wondered if he would take her to see her grandmother – the infamous Molly. Sasha didn't care that she used to be a prostitute, or that she'd been forced into selling Patty's virginity. She was now an old lady who'd paid the price for her sins, and all Sasha wanted was a grandmother to wrap her arms around her and tell her everything was going to be okay.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

October 2008

It came to something when the only positive review Patty had got was from *My Weekly*. The magazine aimed at elderly women of a genteel persuasion thought *Two Hearts* was great and ‘*a welcome departure from her usual smut*’. The rest of the literary world had savaged it. *The Guardian* called it ‘weak and insipid’; *Marie Claire* asked if it had been written by someone else. Normally the pre-orders for her books ran into hundreds of thousands; but with *Two Hearts* due to be published the following week, Darius had said that Waterstones had reported pre-orders of sixteen thousand copies.

Patty felt as though her world was crashing down around her. Her body was making her feel old and useless; her book was being touted as one of the worst ever written, and most shocking of all, she had discovered she actually enjoyed living a more peaceful life in Ireland. Back in March of that year she had taken the plunge and gone to visit her brother Colm in Dublin. Before that, she had ignored him completely. Never acknowledging his letter or contacting him in any way. She’d not spoken to her mother since 1990, when Molly had written to her, asking if she could move back to Ireland, and Patty had bought her a little house in Donnycarney, where she’d lived as a small girl - before her parents died and she was put into an orphanage.

But with old age slowly approaching, and all the shit that had been going on of late, Patty had taken stock of her life, and realised that family was important. Her three girls didn’t need her. She’d struck up quite a friendship with Kylie, but at the end of the day, she had Luca and Sasha there for her. Deciding to be brave, she’d written to Colm and asked if she could come and see him, and he replied instantly, saying he’d love to see her. So, asking Paolo to cover for her, telling people she was with him; she booked a flight with Aer Lingus under her married name, and, wearing a blonde wig, dark glasses and a shell suit from Primark she flew to Dublin. No one had batted an eyelid at the shabbily dressed, middle-aged woman, and Patty suddenly realised she enjoyed being anonymous. After all these years of craving the limelight, it was nice to be a nobody again.

Colm Murphy was a lovely man. He had Molly’s wild, woolly hair, and a kind smile. At six foot three, he towered above Patty, and he explained that Molly had told him that his father had been tall. They laughed at how different their fathers were, and yet they’d both had the same surname. Colm’s dad was Phinnaeus Reilly and Patty’s Augustus Riley. Colm lived in a semi in Drumcondra, a suburb about ten minutes away from Dublin City Centre. He’d lived there with his parents, and now by himself. He’d never married or had children and had an air of sadness about him - like a life unfulfilled. To meet his beautiful, glamorous sister had made him come alive again, and they’d bonded instantly; somehow finding something in the other one.

Patty stayed for a weekend, refusing Colm’s offers to drive her to Donnycarney to see Molly. Instead, they took in the sights of Dublin. Patty had been here before, but had never bothered to learn about the culture; and certainly never revealed to her companions - usually book promoters and publishing people, that this was where her mother had come from. But with Colm she could take a real interest. By the Sunday she even dared to go out without her wig on, not caring if people recognised her. Of course, by the time she was on the flight home, she was panicking, scared that the paparazzi had spotted her and would start questioning who Colm was.

She got away with it, and so Patty decided to go back again. She never went to see Molly; but enjoyed spending time with her brother. She even considered telling the girls about their uncle; but to do that would mean telling them the truth about her background. Her daughters had grown up thinking their grandmother was a rich bitch who'd disowned Patty when she was sixteen. They'd never forgive her if they found out she'd lied to them all their lives. So Colm had to remain a secret.

She sat at her desk, looking at the leather, monogrammed diary Paolo had given her for Christmas present last year. From now until Christmas, all that stretched before her were countless interviews; book signings, and appearances; and for the first time ever, she felt scared. Over the years, she'd practically become Jezebel Cole, turning up for signings in some sexy outfit, pouting and flirting with the men. She wouldn't be able to do that to promote *Two Hearts*. It was a romantic love story; there was no sex or drugs or shopping, or exotic locations. It was a facsimile of a story written by the fifteen year old Patsy Keegan. She'd researched it a bit more this time - going over to Flanders to visit the graves of the fallen soldiers, and speaking to the curator of a museum there; but the basic story was the same.

It would have helped if the book had been well received, but it had been criticised and Patty knew that every interview she gave would be the same. She would have to justify her actions, give reasons why she'd abandoned Jezebel. How could she tell the truth? That William Morton, the head of Ring Tel was her childhood crush and the inspiration for the book? People would ask how they met and she would have to reveal that William used to live in a house down the road from her mother's brothel. It was out of the question.

Her mobile began to ring, and she saw it was Colm. She'd never given him her home number – she didn't want Mrs Watson finding out about him.

'Hello Colm,' she said. 'How are you?'

'Not so good Patty, not so good,' he said. 'We've had some bad news today. Our mother is dying.'

'What?'

'She hasn't been too good for a while. But as you know, she's a stubborn woman and it was difficult to get her to go to the doctor. But I did and they ran some tests. She has cancer of the bowel.'

'Bowel cancer? But they can cure that can't they?'

'It's already spread to her pancreas. They've given her no more than six months.'

'Are you sure there's nothing more they can do? I'll pay.' She'd said this without thinking, suddenly realising she couldn't bear the thought of her mother dying. Whatever Molly had done - and she hadn't seen her in twenty eight years, she always knew where she was; got updates on her life from Colm. And she was only seventy-five, that was no age these days.

'The only thing that would make her feel more comfortable would be to see you. She wants you with her Patty.'

Patty couldn't reply. She'd made her mind up years ago that she never wanted to see her mother again. She didn't think it unreasonable to disown her after all that she'd done. But it was different now. Molly was dying, and may not even be around to see Christmas. What harm would it do to go and visit her? Just this once.

'Okay,' she said. 'I'll come. But it doesn't mean I forgive her.'

'Bless you Patty. Bless you. I'll get your bed ready.'

Using Paolo as a cover once more, Patty booked herself onto an Aer Lingus flight; but this time she was shaking as she boarded the plane. She kept telling herself it was stupid to be nervous about seeing her own mother; but she was. She was frightened of how Molly would look; of what she would say to her. Partly she was ashamed. Molly had had every reason to be embarrassed by her when she was a baby, but she'd held her head high and was proud of her black baby. Now that self-same baby was rich and famous, she couldn't even find it in her to let the world know who her mum really was.

Colm met her at Dublin airport, and instead of driving her back to Drumcondra, he took the road to Donnycarney. Patty had never even been there before – her agents had done all the work when buying the house.

'I haven't told Mother you're coming,' Colm said as they made their way there. 'I thought I'd leave it as a surprise.'

'Is she very weak?' Patty asked, trying hard to steady her thumping heart.

'Not too bad. She gets tired easily, so I pay me mate Ray a few Euros to come in and tend to the garden. She can't do it herself anymore; but she likes to sit at the window and look out at the flowers.'

'She wasn't interested in flowers when I was a child. Our back yard was always covered in weeds.'

'Well I guess she's changed. Maybe it's because her baby girl bought it for her. She wants to keep it nice.'

The house was a lovely little bungalow near to Parnell Park; with roses round the door and pottery animals in the front garden. Patty shook as Colm pulled into the driveway, and on looking up, saw the net curtain twitch. To her horror, her eyes filled with tears and her heart swelled with excitement at the thought of seeing her mother once again. She still had memories of being a little girl, and Molly cuddling her and telling her stories about her life back in Ireland. Sometimes that little girl was still there, and just wanted a cuddle from her mum; but she never got it. The irony being that in order to make them strong, she'd deliberately pushed her daughters away. Now they never cuddled her either.

Colm took Patty's overnight bag and walked up to the door. She followed behind him, her legs shaking, and a part of her wanting to turn and run away.

The door opened and even though it was twenty eight years since she'd last seen her, Patty recognised her mother immediately. She was a little huddled over, and had lost a lot of weight; but the frizzy hair was the same, as were the bright blue eyes that defied her age.

'P-Patsy,' she uttered.

'Hello Mum.'

With huge effort, the old woman held out her arms and without thinking, Patty ran to her, embracing her. Molly's body felt bony and small, but her grip was firm, just as it had been when Patty was a little girl.

'I knew you'd come,' Molly whispered. 'I knew my Patsy would come back to me.'

The house was warm and cosy, and every surface was covered in nik naks and ornaments. Patty felt a pang of jealousy when she saw the photograph on top of the TV of Molly and Colm on a beach somewhere, on a holiday they'd taken together. In some ways she was grateful to her brother for keeping her mother company in her old age, but by the same token, she felt ashamed, knowing she should have done more.

'Sit down Patsy love,' Molly said. 'I'll make you a cup of tea.'

'You'll do no such thing mother,' Colm said. 'You and Patty sit together. I'll make us some tea.'

Patty joined her mother on a plump sofa that she must have bought with the furniture allowance she'd given her when she'd bought the house. Talbot Road was never like this - never cosy. What Patty would have given to grow up in a lovely house like this; with French doors leading out onto a beautiful garden, and blissful, wonderful peace and quiet.

'How are you feeling?' Patty asked.

'Tired. I just feel tired for now. They wanted to give me that chemotherapy, but what was the point of that? It was just going to keep me alive for longer. I'm seventy five. I've got two beautiful children and three grand-daughters.'

'That you've never seen,' Patty said quietly, trying not to cry.

'Course I've seen 'em. Sasha's married to that footballer feller. Rorie, well that girl is so beautiful I have to pinch meself to believe she's my grand-daughter.'

'Imagine what it's like for me,' Patty smiled. 'She's nearly a foot taller than me!'

'And young Dana. I've seen her on the telly and in the papers. I'm afraid she takes after me in the body stakes. She's a chubby little thing.'

'And always on a diet. I keep telling her to accept herself the way she is, but she doesn't listen to me.'

'You must be very proud of all three of them.'

‘I am. But I’ve let them lead their own lives. I never wanted to be one of those mothers who cling to their kids, stopping them from blossoming. Trouble is, I think I’ve been too detached. They don’t want to know me now.’ She realised what she’d said and blushed, looking down. ‘I guess you could call it karma.’

‘Patsy I’m dying. Please don’t keep going on about what’s passed. I just want us to make our peace before I go.’

‘Are you sure there’s nothing they can do? You could have another twenty years.’

‘I don’t want twenty years Patsy. What am I going to do? Sit around twiddling my thumbs? I’ve had a full life. I’m tired, and most of all, you’ve come back to me. That’s all I wanted... Well, there is one more thing I want.’

‘Name it.’

‘When I was a girl, maybe eight or ten - I know I hadn’t been in the orphanage long. Father Flynn took us on a trip. He was a lovely man. He went off to Rome, you know. But for that short time he was with us, he tried his hardest to make that place like a proper home. We caught him scolding a nun once. She was telling off this little girl who’d stolen an extra bread roll, and Father Flynn gave her a proper piece of his mind. Anyway, he took us all to Galway for a holiday. I remember him hiring these old army trucks, and us kids piling into the back, and we drove all the way across Ireland. We stayed in this old mansion house that someone had left to the Church, and it was the happiest I’d been since before the Lord took my Mammy and Da. I’d like to go back there. I’d like to die in Galway.’

Colm rejoined them, carrying a tray with a teapot and three cups and saucers on. He sat on the adjacent armchair, laying the tray on the coffee table.

‘Has mother been filling your head with her dreams of Galway?’ he asked. ‘I’ve told her to stop dreaming about it. Where she needs to go is America. I’m sure there’ll be a cure for her over there.’

‘I don’t want a cure Colm,’ Molly snapped. ‘When I was in prison, I used to lay in that cold cell, surrounded by the screaming and the shouting, never getting any peace and quiet, and I’d close me eyes and imagine that Galway shoreline. I was a little girl again, running barefoot into the sea. It’s where I want to end my days.’

‘If it’s what you really want, then I’ll do it for you Mum,’ Patty said. ‘We can rent this place out and find you somewhere in Galway. Somewhere right by the sea.’

‘Do you mean that Patricia?’ she gasped. ‘You’d do that for me?’

‘I owe you Mum,’ she smiled. ‘If you want to spend your last days in Galway, then that’s what you’ll do.’

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

All three women needed to stretch their legs after getting off that cramped plane. It might have only been a forty minute flight from Stansted to Dublin; but Ryanair flew very basic planes, and Sasha, Phillipa and Kylie were all tall and their legs felt like jelly. They collected their overnight bags from the carousel, and Phillipa headed outside to call a taxi to take them to Drumcondra. Sasha's heart was beating fast; nervous at the thought of being reunited with Patty, and yet scared they'd got the wrong end of the stick and she wasn't even here. After what Kylie had said, the worry remained in the back of her mind that her mother had killed herself, and she knew if Patty wasn't in Ireland, then she would have to go to the police with her concerns.

Phillipa came back in to let them know she'd got a cab, and they headed outside. Sasha's stomach was churning, and Kylie looked decidedly peaky. Sasha wanted to ask her if it was morning sickness, but couldn't because no one knew about the pregnancy; and she didn't want Phillipa to hear.

They were in Drumcondra within ten minutes. It was a leafy suburb close to Dublin City Centre, and Colm Murphy's house was near to Croke Park, Ireland's largest athletic stadium. Hearing that his passengers were English, the taxi driver took great pleasure in giving them the full history of the Park; how it was once the scene of a massacre by the Black and Tans, who were the Royal Irish Constabulary Reserve Force. Phillipa found it highly interesting but Sasha just wanted him to shut up. For one it happened nearly a hundred years ago, and two if he only but knew it, she was part-Irish herself, so it was her history too - not just exclusive to him.

Finally they pulled up outside a small semi on the end of a long street, and got out. The taxi driver gave Phillipa his business card, and told her to call him any time; which made Sasha laugh, given the huge wedding ring he was wearing. He fetched their bags from the boot and drove off.

Taking a deep breath, Sasha went first, heading to the street door and ringing the bell, wondering what she would find.

Expecting to be met by an elderly man, she was shocked to find a young woman of Kylie's age standing there. She was wearing a bikini top and a towel wrapped around her middle, and was running a comb through her long, wet, dark hair.

'Hi there,' she said, her accent clearly Australian.

'Er, I was looking for Colm Murphy,' Sasha said. 'I thought he lived here.'

'Oh he doesn't live here anymore. I'm sorry.'

'Do you know where he's gone?'

'Galway, I think. We don't really deal with him much - it's an agent we rent the place from. Come in, I'll see if I can find his forwarding address.'

The three women entered the house. It was immediately evident the new occupants were students or travellers. Clothes and magazines were strewn everywhere. Someone had pinned the

New Zealand flag above the fireplace, and on the living room floor, there was an empty sleeping bag that had been abandoned.

‘Take a seat,’ the girl said, scooping up all the magazines that were covering the sofa and throwing them onto the floor. ‘I’m Kiki.’

‘I’m Sasha, this is Kylie and this is Phillipa.’

‘Kylie?’ Kiki smiled. ‘You an Aussie too?’

‘No, my mother just had bad taste.’

Kiki’s face fell, clearly insulted, and Kylie apologised.

‘I just meant my mum named me after Kylie Minogue, with not much thought that one day I’d be an eighty year old saddled with a pop star’s name.’

‘You don’t have to apologise,’ Kiki laughed. ‘Can I get you a drink while you’re waiting?’

‘Tea would be good,’ Phillipa chipped in. Kiki walked off, and the three women sat down. Sasha wondered what Colm would make of his house looking like such a tip. She remembered living like this when she was a student, and didn’t know what it was when you were young, that made you content to live in something that resembled a hovel. She wouldn’t dream of it now. Her thoughts immediately turned to Kylie. She was supposed to be starting university this year. What would she do if she decided to keep the baby? Sasha couldn’t help but think it ironic. She’d always longed for a child of her own, and it never happened, and yet her step-daughter had been saddled with one she didn’t want. Life could be so unfair at times.

‘I wonder if Molly’s dead,’ Sasha pondered. ‘It said in Colm’s letter she was living in Donnycarney, and that’s not too far from here. Why would he move to Galway?’

‘And if that’s the case, is Patty with him?’ asked Phillipa. ‘Do you think we’ve had a wasted journey?’

‘It’s beginning to look like it. I’ve got to face up to the fact that Mum might be dead.’

‘But she said she was coming back,’ whined Kylie.

‘She might have said that just so we didn’t look for her.’

Kiki came back in, managing to hold onto three mugs of tea - a piece of paper clamped between her teeth. The three women took their drinks and Kiki passed the piece of paper to Sasha.

‘That’s his address, I knew we had it somewhere, so we can forward mail. Hardly anything ever comes for him but.’

‘Thanks,’ Sasha replied, opening the paper. It simply read;

Mr Colm Murphy

‘Tigh Cois Farraige’

Rusheen Bay

Co. Galway

Republic of Ireland

Kylie peered over her shoulder.

‘What do those funny words mean?’

‘House near the sea shore,’ Phillipa piped up. ‘My husband’s mother was from Kilkenny. We went to stay with his grandparents one summer. I picked some Gaelic up.’

‘May I ask why you’re looking for Mr Murphy?’ Kiki asked, sitting down upon a beanbag.

‘He’s my uncle,’ Sasha replied. ‘The last letter my mum had from him had this address on. Has he been gone long?’

‘Oh no, a few months. We’ve only been living here since January. We’re all at Trinity College. We were staying in halls, but it’s cheaper to rent. I think he went shortly before that.’

‘Are there direct flights from Dublin to Galway?’

‘I wouldn’t know. Why don’t you have a look online? I’ll go and get my laptop.’

‘You really don’t have to. We can go back to the airport.’

‘Don’t be silly. I’ll be back in a second.’

She got up and left the room again. Sasha looked at Kylie and Phillipa.

‘If you two want to go back to England you can. I don’t mind going to Galway alone.’

‘Don’t be silly,’ said Phillipa, leaning over and squeezing her hand. ‘We’re in this together. Besides, it’s a little holiday for us.’

Kiki returned with her laptop and logged onto the internet. They found an Aer Arann flight departing at 13.20 and arriving in Galway at 13.50. Sasha booked them onto it. Phillipa then rang Niall, the taxi driver, and used all her charm to persuade him to come back and pick her them up from the house. He promised to be there in half an hour; so they settled down to drinking their tea and chatting with the genial Kiki. She told them all about the university – she was studying law – and her job working in a gift shop in the City Centre. She painted such wonderful life as a student it almost made Sasha want to go back to college. Kylie remained silent throughout, and Sasha wondered what was going through her mind? Was she having second thoughts? Was she going to choose motherhood over her studies? Sasha wasn’t sure she could have made such a big decision at eighteen.

Thanking Kiki for all her help; they left the house and went with Niall back to Dublin Airport. Sasha and Kylie sat in the back of the car like a pair of spare parts, while the driver chatted

Phillipa up. Sasha admired the way Phillipa played along with it - she would have been tempted to tell him to shut up. There was nothing sexy about a fat, balding, fifty-something married man trying to hit on you. But Phillipa just took it in good faith, laughing at his stupid jokes and giggling at his compliments.

They finally arrived in Galway at just before two o'clock, and showed the taxi driver the address Kiki had given them. This driver was much quieter than Niall and allowed them to talk in the back of the taxi. Sasha looked out at the beautiful countryside going by, and for the first time ever, felt overwhelmed that she was back in her homeland. Her grandmother had come from this country and all her forefathers before her. Sasha made her mind up that when all this was over - no matter what the outcome - she would take a holiday in Ireland; touring around and getting to know her roots.

'What are you going to do if Patty isn't there?' Phillipa asked.

'We'll stay overnight in a B&B and then we'll head back tomorrow. I'll then go and see PC Satchwell and tell her that I think my mother's dead.'

'What about your sisters? Do they know about this?'

'Dana does. We haven't told Rorie. She doesn't care about what happens to Mum. I know that's a terrible thing to say, but she's so selfish. She takes after Mum I guess. She's not interested in anything unless it concerns her.'

The driver took them to a secluded bay. A sandy beach ran down to the calm sea, and amongst the rocks were nestled little houses. The driver kept a look out for 'Tigh Cois Farraige' and found it, the name displayed on a post outside the gate. Sasha paid him and they got out. She dare not think or feel anything - she'd already had one disappointment today, she couldn't bear another.

She knocked upon the door and within moments it was opened, and this time she knew she'd struck gold. The tall, strapping man standing there was a lot different to the young man in the photograph, but she could see it was the same person. This was her Uncle Colm.

'Yes dear?' he smiled.

'Are you Colm Murphy?' she asked quietly.

'I am. What can I be doing for you?'

'I'm Sasha. Your niece.'

His face paled and his hand shot up to his mouth. Sasha wasn't sure if this was a nice surprise for him or not, and suddenly felt terribly self conscious.

'Sasha,' he uttered. 'I've heard so much about you.'

Sasha was surprised her mother had even mentioned her.

'So you've seen Mum then?'

‘Course I have. She’s here. Come on in. And your friends.’

Shaking, Sasha stepped into the house. It was quite dark and sparsely decorated. Colm led them through the living room and to the back, where in the kitchen, standing by the sink, drying a mug, stood Patty. She looked different; wearing no make-up, her hair scraped back off her face. On seeing her daughter, she promptly dropped the mug and it shattered into a thousand pieces at her feet.

‘S-Sasha!’ she uttered. ‘S-Sasha what are you doing here?’

‘I could ask you the same thing,’ she snapped. ‘I thought you were dead.’

‘B-But how did you find me? No one knew where I was. Not even Kylie.’

‘I’ve been looking for you with the help of Phillipa. She’s a private detective.’

Phillipa raised her hand to say hello. Patty looked at Colm.

‘Colm could you please clear this up for me and make some drinks for Phillipa and Kylie? I need to speak to my daughter.’

Never once raising a smile, never once thanking Sasha for being devoted and seeking her out, Patty grasped her arm and pulled her out of the kitchen, through the living room and out of the house. There was a small bench cut into the stone brick wall that ran around the perimeter, and Patty sat down, pulling Sasha down with her.

‘What the hell do you think you’re doing? How did you find me here?’

‘I know everything Mum. I know all about who you really are, and where you really came from. I even know who and what my dad is.’

‘I never wanted you to find out about Jimmy. Did Kylie tell you?’

‘No. I found out for myself, with Phillipa’s help. We went to Talbot Road and spoke to people who used to know you. I know my grandmother wasn’t some rich bitch. She was a prostitute called Molly, who ran a brothel - where you grew up. You ran away when you were sixteen because Paul, or should I say Paolo, told you the brothel was about to be raided. You must really hate me to have kept all these things from me over the years.’

‘No one knew the truth about me. Only Paolo and this girl I used to be friends with called Susan Clapp.’

‘Who had your diaries.’

‘You found Susan?’

‘Yes.’

‘How? I tried looking for her when I first made it big. I was frightened she’d sell my diaries to the highest-bidder but I couldn’t find her anywhere.’

‘Why do you think everyone is going to betray you Mum? Susan kept those diaries until the other week, when Phillipa and I went to see her and she handed them to me – for nothing.’

‘But how did you find her?’

‘We found her mother and then went to see her daughter, who had her address.’

Patty couldn’t help but smile and shake her head.

‘Susan Clapp. What’s she doing now?’

‘Living in Brighton with her lesbian lover. They run a garden centre.’

‘But why Sasha? Why did you do all of this? Why didn’t you just leave me?’

‘Because you’re my mother. And even though you’ve been a terrible mother and made me feel unloved most of my life, I needed to know where you were. It’s a basic instinct I suppose. Although you managed to fight it I see.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Kylie was coming to stay and I was putting her in the room next to mine. She hates fur and animal cruelty and stuff, so I moved your fur coats out to put them somewhere else. I found a handbag full of documents. That was when I found out about Colm. I also read in the letter that you didn’t want to know about Molly, except to buy her a house.’

Patty looked up and into the distance, at the gentle sea ahead. Sasha could swear she saw tears fill her mother’s eyes, but decided she was probably hallucinating. Patty never cried.

‘Perhaps we’re not so different,’ she said. ‘I too had to know where my mum was. I had to see her before it was too late. That’s why she’s upstairs, in there.’

‘She’s here?’

‘Just about. She’s dying of cancer. It’s a matter of days now.’

‘Is this where you’ve been all this time?’

‘Yes. I just wanted to get away from being Patty Belleville. I wanted to be alone with my mother and my brother, and not be bothered by anyone. So I faked my disappearance, got Kylie to dump the car in Dover and I flew out here.’

‘Did you send me those flowers?’

‘Yes. I couldn’t resist it. I’ve got my laptop here, and the internet; and when I read the interview on-line. I couldn’t believe you did it. Luca’s had it coming to him for years.’

‘So you were only proud of me when I was being nasty?’

‘No. I’ve always been proud of you Sasha. But you were too much like me before I became Patty - reserved, eager to please. That’s how I used to be, and I didn’t want my children to be like it. I wanted you to be strong and independent.’

‘That didn’t mean to say you had to neglect us.’

‘No, you’re right,’ she sighed. ‘Coming here, seeing Molly, has made me realise you never stop needing your mum. I pushed mine aside for over thirty years, because I was ashamed of her, and now I feel disgusted with myself. Look at me Sash, I’m rich beyond my wildest dreams; I’ve several homes, three beautiful kids, and that’s because I was brought up to believe I was special. Molly always made me feel I could achieve something - even though I had the odds stacked against me. It’s fashionable to have mixed race babies now, but back in 1956, to have a black baby out of wedlock was almost a hanging offence. But Molly chose to keep me. She could have put me in a home and God knows what I’d have ended up like if she’d done that.’

‘I guess you could have done the same with me, given what Jimmy did to you.’

‘That never even entered my head Sasha. You probably saved me from myself. Despite what he did, I never stopped loving Jimmy, and if I hadn’t had you I’d have probably gone back to him; and he would have ended up killing me. As it was, I stayed away because I didn’t want him hurting you.’

Sasha couldn’t believe what she was hearing. She’d always thought she meant nothing to Patty – that she was a mere inconvenience who’d got in the way of her mother’s life.

‘So you did love me once.’

‘I’ve loved you since the day you were born. I thought you didn’t like me very much. Even in the home you seemed to prefer being with the other women more than me.’

‘Don’t be ridiculous, I was a tiny baby.’

‘Wait until you have one of your own, you’ll know what I mean. I don’t know, perhaps I felt guilty about having you - bringing you into such horrible circumstances. So I thought you were better off without me.’ She looked at Sasha, furrowing her brow. ‘So what made you go to Talbot Road in the first place? How did you find out about it?’

‘I gave an interview on TV, and William Morton saw me. He came to my house with the original copy of Two Hearts. He told me all about Talbot Road and how you disappeared just after giving him the book. He thought it strange how you disappeared again after publishing it last year. He wondered if it was connected.’

‘William Morton!’ she laughed. ‘My first crush. I’m surprised he remembered me.’

‘Was there a connection between the two?’

‘No. I had a crush on William and wrote the book for him. Then Paul....Paolo warned me of the raid and I used the money I’d saved to move to Battersea. The reason I published Two Hearts last year was that I couldn’t be bothered to write any more Jezebel Cole.’

‘But you love Jezebel.’

‘Jezebel’s fifty years old Sasha. It’s ridiculous having her get up to the same exploits as she did twenty years ago. It’s no fun being this age - the bloody change is horrendous. I just couldn’t

motivate myself. So, in my own stupid way, I thought I could reinvent myself as a Queen of Romance, and decided to rewrite Two Hearts. What a disaster that was.'

'People just don't like change mum. If you kept trying, they'd grow to like it.'

'Maybe, who knows? I've more important things to worry about.'

'Will you come back to London once Molly has passed away?'

'I don't know. I like it here. Colm wants to stay in Galway, and I have to say I quite like the thought of staying, too.'

'You'd miss London.'

'Some of the time. I haven't really thought much about it. I can't give up on Ireland completely. I suppose when you've Irish blood in you, you never really leave the place.'

'I know what you mean. As soon as I drove here and saw the hills and the sea and everything, I just felt as though I belonged.'

'Stay with me Sasha. Until after Molly's funeral. Please.'

How could Sasha refuse? All she'd wanted all her life was for her mother to need her. And here she was, putting her heart on the line.

'Of course I will. Though Kylie needs me too. She's pregnant.'

'Pregnant?'

'Yes, by Rob Gilbey. I could kill him, taking advantage of a kid like that.'

'Is she keeping it?'

'She reckons she wants an abortion. But whatever she chooses I'll stand by her.'

They were interrupted by a voice.

'Mrs Chase! Mrs Chase!'

They both turned round. A nurse in a blue uniform was standing in the doorway, a frantic look upon her face.

'What is it Grace?' Patty called.

'It's Molly. She's not too good.'

Patty stood up, and Sasha joined her. She held her mother's arm as they walked to the house.

'I hired Grace to take care of Mum,' Patty explained. 'She gives her her painkillers and things.'

They went into the house and up the stairs to the next floor. The bedroom was at the front, and Sasha felt suddenly terrified about meeting her grandmother for the first time. As if she could

read her thoughts, Patty reached down and took her hand and led her into the room. Colm was already in there, sitting beside the bed, holding onto Molly's hand. Sasha berated herself for expecting the blousy red head she'd read about in Patty's diaries to be there. Instead, in the middle of the bed lay a tiny woman with a shock of grey woolly hair.

'Pat...Pat....Pat,' she attempted to say, nothing more than a rasp.

'Mum,' Patty said softly. 'This is Sasha, your grand-daughter.'

The old lady tried to smile, but Sasha could see even doing this was painful. Patty gave Sasha a slight push and she stepped forward, closer to the bed. She'd never been near a dying person before, and felt slightly scared of what to expect. She took hold of Molly's other hand. It felt small and frail, and she didn't squeeze it in fear of hurting her.

'Hello Gran,' she said.

'Gran...gran,' the old woman rasped as if saying it to herself – she'd never been called it before. Sasha heard a sob behind her and realised her mother was crying.

'Shall I go and fetch Father Maurice?' asked Nurse Grace.

'Please,' replied Colm. 'I think the time has come.'

The nurse left the room, and Sasha looked at Patty.

'What's happening?'

'Grace has gone to fetch the priest so he can perform the Last Rites on Mum.'

Sasha sat on the bed, still holding her grandmother's hand. It was so hard to equate this shell of a woman with that battleaxe described in Patty's diaries. She was struggling to breathe, and Sasha could feel her trembling. Patty laid her hand upon Sasha's shoulder and kissed the top of her head.

'Why don't you go downstairs?' she asked. 'Phillipa and Kylie will think you're neglecting them.'

Sasha realised Patty wanted to be alone with Colm and Molly in her mother's final moments, and without thinking she gently raised her grandmother's hand to her lips and kissed it. She let it go and stood up, looking Molly in the eye, hoping she could see her.

'Goodbye Gran,' she said. 'It was nice to meet you.'

She turned and looked at her mother. She didn't look like Patty Belleville. She looked like a small, haggard, worn out, fifty-three year old woman who had suffered enough. Without saying another word, Sasha reached out and pulled Patty to her. Enfolding her in an embrace. Patty responded, wrapping her arms around her daughter's waist and holding on tightly.

'I'm glad I found you,' Sasha whispered.

'Me too,' Patty replied.

Sasha let her mother go and stepped away. She smiled at Colm and left the room. She went downstairs to find Phillipa and Kylie in the living room, drinking coffee and eating biscuits. So much had happened, Sasha couldn't think about eating or drinking. She flopped down next to Kylie and buried her head in her hands.

'How was it?' Phillipa asked.

'Horrible. I've never seen anyone close to death before. She looks like a ghost, and she's not even dead.'

'Did Patty tell her who you were?'

'Yes. I think she was happy.'

It suddenly hit her that it was all over. The search that had dominated her life for the past few weeks had come to a close. She had found her mother and she was okay. She didn't need Phillipa anymore.

'Thanks for helping me find her,' she said. 'I couldn't have done it without you.'

'Hey it's my job,' Phillipa laughed. 'It's been fun. I get so tired of chasing after unfaithful husbands. I hope you'll write a review on my website.'

'Of course I will, and if anyone else needs a PI, I'll recommend you.'

'Anyway, we can stay friends can't we? Especially if you see Seth again.'

'Yes who was that guy?' Kylie laughed. 'I saw you in the paper.'

'He's one of Phillipa's friends. His aunt used to be my mother's dressmaker. With a coincidence like that, we just had to see each other.'

'Did you know that Dad paid for that private investigator to photograph you?'

'No. Did he?'

'I overheard him and Melanie talking. He wanted to find out anything he could about you so he could retract his offer.'

'What a bastard,' gasped Phillipa.

'Well my solicitor reckons he hasn't got a leg to stand on anyway,' said Sasha. 'He has no proof that I've been unfaithful, but Melanie's baby's every proof he was.'

Their speech was halted by the front door opening. Nurse Grace came in, followed by a young priest. At the same time, Colm came down the stairs, his face tear-stained. He shook his head, indicating that the priest had come too late. Sasha wondered if she should go upstairs to her mother, or if she'd want to be left alone.

Without saying a word, the priest followed Colm upstairs, Nurse Grace behind them.

'Is she dead?' Kylie asked.

‘I think so,’ Sasha replied. ‘Poor Mum.’

Patty came back downstairs about an hour later. Nurse Grace had called the undertakers to arrange for them to come and take Molly’s body away, and Father Maurice said he would return in a couple of days time to discuss the funeral. Colm went out for a walk along the beach, as he wanted to be by himself, and Sasha felt so sorry for him. He’d already lost his adoptive parents, now he’d lost his birth mother too. But men didn’t like talking about their feelings and preferred to retreat into their own worlds. It was easier for him to be alone.

Sensing mother and daughter had much to talk about, Phillipa stood up, shoving her hands in her back pockets in that girlish way she had, and looked at Kylie.

‘You know, I really fancy fish and chips,’ she suddenly said. ‘I bet a seaside town like this would have a wonderful fish and chip restaurant. How do you fancy it Kylie? My treat?’

‘You’re on,’ Kylie smiled. ‘I’m starving.’

The two women left, and it was just Patty and Sasha. Patty flopped down on the sofa, her face ashen, her expression defeated. Sasha wondered what was going through her mind. They’d never been close enough to build up that sort of bond - to know what the other was thinking.

‘Would you like a drink mum?’ she asked. ‘A proper drink?’

‘There’s some scotch in the kitchen. We can have that.’

Sasha fetched the bottle of Jamesons from the kitchen table and two glasses. She rejoined her mother and sat beside her, pouring her a huge glass of whisky – she felt she needed it.

‘Does Father Maurice know about Molly?’ Sasha asked. ‘You know, about her past?’

‘Yes, he knows everything. He’s been a great comfort to her in recent weeks. She told me she’d confessed all her sins to him, and because of that, because she repented, she was entitled to a Catholic funeral.’

‘What about you? Can you forgive her?’

‘Do you forgive me?’

‘Of course I do. You’re my mother.’

‘Exactly. It’s not an easy job Sasha. You make lots of mistakes that can’t be rectified. You think you’re doing your best for your children and all you’re doing is driving them away. Up until Roger started blackmailing Molly, I had a pretty charmed life. Yes, the kids at school teased me, but being the colour I was, my mum could have been a secretary and I’d have still been bullied. But at home, well Mum always protected me. Up until I was old enough to understand what was going on, I just thought I lived in this big house with lots of big sisters. I probably learned about sex far too early; but mum never did anything to hurt me. It just changed when Roger started blackmailing her. He threatened her that if she didn’t give him a cut of the wages, he’d close her down; put her in prison and me in care. It was lucky for me that of all the people he wanted me to sleep with, it was Paul, and he was gay.’

‘Is it true? What you wrote in your diary about you sleeping with Molly’s clients behind her back?’

‘I wanted to save enough money to get away from Talbot Road and start up on my own. I blamed Molly for everything that had gone wrong in my life, and figured I could do better by myself. When Paul warned me about the raid, and the investigation on Roger, I left. I didn’t even tell Molly where I was going. I just went to stay with Paul’s aunt in Battersea. I got a job as a waitress in a café, but I was so bored. Then Susan’s mum got put into prison and Susan came to live with me. We made friends with the woman who lived next door. She was a high class hooker and got us some work. It wasn’t all bad. Then I met your dad again and I gave it all up. He didn’t know what I did, until one night, when I was expecting you, we went to this party in the West End and one of my old clients was there. He told Jimmy what I used to be and that was when he took me outside and beat my face to a pulp.’

‘I wish you’d told me about him. I wish you’d let me make up my own mind about him.’

‘I was trying to protect you. I didn’t want you going to visit him, and him trying to get you on side. He’s sick Sasha. Sick. You don’t need him in your life.’

‘It would have just been nice to have a name for my dad that’s all.’

‘James David Lee,’ Patty snapped. ‘James David Lee, Prisoner 243890 High Wall Prison, Devon. There you are. Why don’t you write to him? Tell him what an awful mother I’ve been and how much better you’d have been without me?’ Uncharacteristically, Patty broke down. For a moment, Sasha didn’t know what to do. She’d never had to comfort Patty before; but she looked so small and tired, she couldn’t help but pity her. She reached out and took her mother in her arms, pulling her to her. Patty sobbed raw tears of grief, against her shoulder. She clung onto Sasha, her body shaking, and Sasha held her tightly. Without words, she knew why Patty felt so bad. As well as being a bad mother, she’d been a terrible daughter, and now she could never make up for her selfishness to Molly.

‘I’m such a failure Sash,’ she cried. ‘Where it matters. As a daughter; as a mother; as a wife. I’ve made such a mess of my life.’

‘Well you’re still young enough to change. Me, Rorie and Dana all need you, no matter how old we are. If you were a lost cause, I wouldn’t have come looking for you.’

Phillipa went home the next day, but Kylie begged Sasha to let her stay in Ireland. Sasha phoned Luca and told him where his daughter was, and she found it quite disturbing the way he showed very little interest in her whereabouts. All he did was ask if Sasha wanted some money wired across, to go towards her upkeep. Sasha slammed the phone down on him, then called Seth and explained to him everything that had happened. After all that had gone on, Sasha was determined to grasp happiness wherever she could and take a chance on a new relationship. And if they were going to be together, Seth deserved to know the truth.

With a week to go until Molly’s funeral, the three generations of women spent a lot of time together. Colm had taken his mother’s death quite badly and spent most of his time in the

Duggan Arms - the local pub. Kylie in her youthful naivety thought they should go and get him and stop him from being alone; but both Sasha and Patty advised her to leave him be. Everyone had their own way of handling grief and this was Colm's.

Like her mother, Sasha fell in love with Galway, and wondered if she should stay. After all, she illustrated children's books for a living. It didn't matter where she lived. There was something so calming and peaceful about walking along the beach at dawn. Staring across the Atlantic, thinking about all the people over the years who had travelled on that deceptively calm sea - including her own grandfather, when he'd made the voyage over from the West Indies. Would he have come if he'd known his life was going to end so brutally? She doubted it.

On the morning before Molly's funeral, Sasha took her usual early morning walk, watching the sunrise on the horizon, and realising that the next day she would go to a funeral for the first time in her life. It was quite something, to reach thirty-three and never have been to one; but she'd had no proper family to speak of, and all her friends were her own age. Both Luca's grandparents were alive, and so there had been no death on his side. Sasha felt strangely nervous about the whole thing, not knowing what to expect.

Sitting on a rock, gathering her thoughts. She looked round and saw Patty walking towards her. She had one of Colm's fleeces on, and it swamped her tiny frame, coming practically down to her knees. She was also wearing jeans, which was a first; Patty had always been so elegant - even when she was relaxed.

She sat down next to Sasha and looked out at the sea.

'I've been awake all night,' she said. 'Take this advice Sasha. If you discover you can't take HRT, make sure you have some sort of sleeping cure that puts you out between the ages of fifty and fifty-five.'

Sasha laughed at her mother's joke. She almost sounded like her witty old self.

'It gave me the chance to think though,' she continued. 'I've made a few decisions, and the first one is that I'd like you and me to take a holiday.'

'Us two? Just the two of us?'

'Um. I've spent too long neglecting you Sasha. You're going through a messy divorce and you need someone there for you. So, how would you like to go to Trinidad?'

'Trinidad?'

'Yes. It's where your grandfather came from. I've been to the Caribbean but it's been the Bahamas or St Lucia. I've never been to Trinidad, and I think it's time we went and saw a bit of our history.'

'That sounds wonderful,' Sasha gasped, shocked at her mother's generosity. Patty may have turned over a new leaf, but Sasha could guarantee they would be flying first-class and staying at the island's top hotel.

'Then when we come back, I'm going to move here. For good.'

‘Here in Galway?’

‘Yes. I’d like you to stay in the house in Chelsea and share it with Dana.’

Sasha glanced back at the rather ramshackle house Patty was currently renting and couldn’t imagine her staying there.

‘Oh don’t worry, I won’t be buying that place,’ Patty laughed. ‘A few miles up the road there’s a small, Georgian mansion. It used to belong to some English guy who fancied himself lord of the manor. It’s got six bedrooms and a huge garden and everything I could possibly need. At the bottom of the garden is a gate that leads directly to a private beach. I find the sea so inspirational.’

‘What about Colm?’

‘I think he’ll come with me. We’re the only family he’s got now, after all.’

‘What about your writing? Are you going to go back to writing about Jezebel Cole?’

‘No. I’m sorry if the public don’t like it, but I’m going to carry on with romances. I’m too old for all that raunch. I don’t even have a man in my life.’

‘Oh I bet that won’t be for long. There’s probably some hunky Irishman just around the corner, waiting to sweep you off your feet.’

‘Well it would be nice if there was,’ she sighed. ‘But I feel so old and decrepit at the moment, I feel as though I have nothing to offer anyone.’

‘That’ll pass. A holiday in Trinidad will do you the world of good.’

‘I’m also going to phone Bridget Bowden and ask her to come over and do an interview with me.’

Bridget Bowden was a freelance journalist who wrote for *The Times* and various women’s magazines. She’d absolutely savaged *Two Hearts* and had accused Patty of being past it. Why on earth would she want to do an interview with her?

‘But she was so horrible about you.’

‘No, she was honest. *Two Hearts* was a dreadful book. I wrote it when I was fifteen; then just re-wrote it to shut the publisher up. I want to do an interview with Bridget telling the whole truth. Why I went missing, why I’m here and that I’m going to stay.’

‘You’re going to admit to being a prostitute?’

‘It was thirty five years ago. I’m not going to be arrested for it now am I? If my fans realise what I’m going through, they’ll be more forgiving about my change in direction. I’m not going to rush with my new book. I’m going to do my research and make it something half decent.’

‘You really have changed haven’t you?’

‘Not really. Perhaps I’ve just gone back to being Patsy.’

Molly’s funeral was a quiet affair. Just Patty, Colm, Sasha, Kylie and a couple of elderly women from the village who liked to attend funerals - no matter whose they were. Unlike the funerals Sasha had seen on the TV, there were no dramatics; no one gave an emotional reading, and Patty didn’t try and throw herself onto the coffin when it was lowered into the ground. She remained dignified throughout, and when she threw a single pink rose onto the coffin, her only words were ‘*Sorry Mum*’.

Afterwards they headed back to the house, where Patty and Sasha made sandwiches, and gave Father Maurice a glass of whiskey to thank him for all his help. Sasha still found the whole situation surreal. Everything her mother had ever done had been dramatic and over the top, and it was hard to accept her here in a small, rather scruffy house in the middle of Galway; making tuna and cucumber sandwiches and drinking tea. Kylie said she wanted some time to herself and went out, leaving the adults behind. Sasha herself was thinking about London. She wanted to see Seth and get on with the divorce proceedings. But how could she leave her mother? Patty had been through so much.

‘I hear you’re staying in Galway Mrs Chase,’ Father Maurice said, accepting another sandwich from Sasha. He’d made himself quite at home in the living room and it made Sasha laugh to herself. She wondered if this was one of the perks of the job – visiting people’s homes and being given free food and drink.

‘Yes,’ Patty replied. ‘I used to laugh at all those stories about if you’ve Irish blood you never really leave the place, but you know what? I think it’s true.’

‘Well I hope we’ll see you around. You won’t be one of those city people who come to the village and lock themselves away, living their lives through the internet, will you?’

‘No, I’m far too much of a social animal to spend all my time online. I might even get a dog. I like walking on the beach, so it would be good to get a little companion.’

‘My sister Bernadette works in a centre for poor abandoned animals in Forramoyle. Perhaps she could find something for you.’

‘That would be lovely, thank you.’

‘I don’t want some little rat thing,’ Colm piped up, and Sasha and Patty smiled at each other. This was his first indication he’d given that he was going to move in with Patty at Benbarry House - her new home. ‘I want a proper dog.’

‘Well perhaps we’ll get two,’ Patty laughed. ‘The house is big enough.’

‘I really should think about getting home,’ Sasha said quietly. ‘I need to start fighting my husband.’

‘Of course,’ Patty replied. ‘And I’ll start planning that holiday. Annette Laurent King owns the Pearl Hotel in Port of Spain - perhaps we could stay there.’

Sasha burst out laughing. Annette Laurent King was one of the richest women in the world. How typical of Patty to want to sponge off her.

‘What’s funny?’ she asked.

‘You are. I was almost thinking you were going to suggest we stayed at some tacky all-inclusive resort. But it’s good to see the old Patty is still there.’

‘Your mother deserves some luxury,’ Colm said. ‘She’s done things for Molly in her final days that no child should do for their mother. Let her have some fun.’

‘You’re right,’ Sasha said. ‘Sorry Mum.’

‘No need to apologise,’ Patty laughed. ‘You’re right. I might have changed but I’m certainly not going to start slumming it!’

They all laughed, and Father Maurice poured himself another glass of whiskey. Sasha realised that Kylie had been out for over an hour, and figured she must have been freezing. It was a cold March day and the winds were horrendous. The other day Sasha had gone out, and salt from the sea had literally blown onto her face and stuck to her skin.

‘I’m just going to see where Kylie is,’ she said. ‘Excuse me.’

Walking out of the house, within moments she was blown sideways by an enormous gust of wind. She walked out onto the beach and looked around for Kylie. There was no one around. The wind was blowing the sea, causing foamy waves to rise and crash, and for a moment a horrible thought struck Sasha. She’d been so wrapped up in Patty over this past week, she’d almost neglected Kylie. What if she’d become depressed at her predicament and had done something silly?

‘Kylie!’ she called out, scared her step-daughter had walked into the sea. ‘Kylie where are you?’

She heard a little sniff and looked round to find Kylie sitting in a nook, in the middle of some rocks, her hair blowing around her face; wiping tears away from her cheeks with her sleeve.

‘Oh darling,’ Sasha smiled, sitting down beside her. ‘Have I been ignoring you?’

‘Don’t be silly. You had to look after Patty.’

‘I know, but when I married your dad, I made the commitment to look after you too and I’ve been neglecting you.’

‘I don’t want to go back to dad and Melanie,’ she sniffed. ‘I’m going to ask him to buy me a flat.’

‘There’s no need for that, you can come and live with me in Mum’s old house.’

‘I can’t expect you to put up with me and....’

‘And what?’

She looked at Sasha and seemed so grown up and scared. Her beautiful blue eyes sparkling with tears.

‘I can’t go through with it,’ she said. ‘I can’t go through with the abortion.’

‘Are you serious?’

‘How can I do it? I’m rich; I’ve got a dad and soon to be two stepmothers; lots of friends and a home wherever I want it. This morning we buried a woman who had a child of colour back in the 1950s. She lived in one room and had no money. But she didn’t give Patty away did she? Why should I abort my baby?’

‘You’re not Molly. You’re you and you’ve got to do whatever you think is best.’

‘I’ll postpone my studies and get a job. I’ll be fine.’

Sasha wrapped her arm around her step-daughter’s shoulders and pulled her to her, cuddling her. She wondered if she’d made the right decision. Eighteen was very young to have a baby, and it would never know its father - Rob Gilbey wanted nothing to do with her after all. Sasha knew what it felt like to grow up without a dad. But at the same time she couldn’t help but feel just the slightest bit excited. There was going to be a baby in the house - something she’d wanted for so long.

‘You don’t have to be on your own Kylie,’ she said. ‘You’re going to move in with me and we’ll bring up the baby together. And you’re certainly not going to give up your studies.’

‘But you’re not even going to be my step-mum in a few weeks time. You’ll be divorced.’

‘A piece of paper won’t change my feelings for you Kylie. I’ve known you since you were a little girl and love you like you were my own daughter. You’re stuck with me I’m afraid, and we’re going to see this through together.’

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

September 2009

Patty had been back from Trinidad for ten days, and she still hadn't adjusted to the cold climate. Galway was warmer than London; but compared to the tropical heat of Port of Spain, it was freezing. She'd spent a fantastic three weeks staying at the six star Pearl Hotel, which was owned by her friend Annette Laurent King. She and Sasha had had their own apartment, with a private pool and tennis court, and being a rich and famous (and now notorious) writer, Patty had received an invitation to dinner with the High Commissioner. When she told him her father's name, and that he had come from Trinidad, he promised to see if he could find any relatives that may still be living on the island. Patty was shocked, when a few days later she received a telephone call from him, telling her he had discovered she had an aunt – Agnes Smith, who lived in Toco. They went to visit her, and spent three days staying on her ramshackle farm; eating mutton curry, drinking fresh mango juice and being visited by various relatives who took them to their hearts. It felt strange for Patty to hear stories of the father she had no memory of, and when she left, she promised to keep in touch with them.

Now she was back in Ireland and ready to start her new life. While she'd been away, the finishing touches had been put on Benbarry House, namely a study for her to do her writing in; and a separate apartment for Colm so they wouldn't get under each other's feet. On the Wednesday, she'd gone with Father Maurice to his sister's rescue centre and she'd picked out Orla and Finlay, a pair of golden Labradors whose elderly owner had died. They were big and boisterous and seemed to fill the house. But when Patty sat down at night to watch television, it was nice to have them at her feet, keeping her warm. She liked to take them for walks along the beach, enjoying the silence and thinking.

She'd already started work on her new novel. It was based on her own parents' lives, but instead of Molly going to London, she was going to leave her Galway home and go to Dublin. Instead of Augustus being a West Indian, he was going to be a Protestant and their divisions would be religious rather than racial. But this time Patty wasn't going to rush it, and was determined to do her research before putting it in for publication.

Just before shutting her laptop, ready to take the dogs for a walk, she received an email from Sasha. It warmed Patty's heart how her relationship with her eldest daughter had changed. Rorie hadn't spoken to her since she'd revealed where she'd been, but Patty shrugged it off; Rorie always had been a selfish little cow and would come round when she needed something. Dana was her usual, affable self, just grateful her mother was back. But with everything that had happened, Patty realised how much Sasha loved her - more than she ever knew before. Her email was remarkably upbeat.

Mum

Have just come back from meeting with Luca's solicitor. Because I've agreed to take care of Kylie and the baby, he's agreed to reinstate his offer of ten million on the premise half of it goes to Kylie.

Off to buy an outfit for tonight, Seth's taking me to dinner! Will call you at the weekend.

Sash x

Patty was pleased that Luca had backed down. Patty had never liked him and was actually glad that he and Sasha had split up. It was quite a coincidence that she'd started going out with old Abie Cohen's nephew. Patty hoped that he'd treat her better than Luca ever did.

Turning off her laptop, she got up to get the dogs and cursed when the phone started to ring. She wondered if there was a young girl in the village who would be willing to work for her a couple of hours a day as a PA. At the moment she could cope with the volume of calls and emails, but once she became more engrossed in writing her new novel, she wouldn't want the interruption.

Fighting the urge to let it go to voicemail, she picked it up, spotting Orla and Finlay getting restless by the door.

'Hello, Patty Belleville.'

'Hello, Miss Belleville,' boomed a deep, American voice. 'How are you?'

'I'm very well thank you. I was just about to take my dogs for a walk.'

'Well I won't keep you much longer but let me introduce myself. My name is Clinton Knightley, I'm the CEO of Glimmer Films. I love your book.'

'I'm sorry, all the Jezebel Cole books are franchised to Cerise Films in Los Angeles.'

'I don't mean Jezebel Cole. I mean Two Hearts. I've just finished reading it and you know what, I think it would make a fantastic movie.'

'You're kidding!'

'I'm not. I was wondering if I come and visit you in Ireland to discuss it. My mother was from Galway you know. It would be nice to see the old country.'

'Of course,' Patty smiled. 'Why don't you email me all your details and we'll make arrangements.'

'Sounds great. Is it okay to use the email address on your website?'

'It certainly is. Thank you Mr Knightley.'

'No, thank *you* Miss Belleville. I look forward to you showing me Ireland.'

Patty couldn't believe this turn around in her fortunes. She was set to put Two Hearts down to being a bad mistake and was even thinking of asking Nova to stop publication. But here was a film producer interested in making it.

She walked the dogs along the beach, heading towards the house where her mother had died. She often walked along here - as though it was drawing her back to Molly. She thought of her old, glamorous life back in London and realised she didn't miss any of it. Paolo and Daffyd were

coming to stay the following weekend and she hoped they wouldn't expect her to hold some wild party. And she certainly hoped Paolo wouldn't make fun of the simple Colm.

Her thoughts were disturbed by the sound of dogs barking, and up ahead she saw Orla and Finlay had found a friend to play with. It was a huge Irish wolfhound that swamped her dogs and lumbered around, trying to keep up with them. Patty looked for their owner and found it to be a tall man who was walking towards her. Coming closer, Patty could see he struck quite a figure, with a full head of grey hair and a neat goatie beard. There was something arty and Bohemian about him and she found herself suddenly fascinated.

'Are those two yours?' he smiled, his accent local.

'Yes,' she replied. 'They're not tormenting your one are they?'

'Oh no. Colin's a lazy bugger, he needs the exercise.'

He was very handsome. Patty estimated him to be the same age as her. His tanned skin was rather rugged, but he had the brightest blue eyes that twinkled with mischievousness.

'Do you live around here?' Patty asked.

'I've just bought a cottage along the coast. What about you? You a local?'

'I am now. I've just moved into the big house along the road.'

He stuck out his hand.

'James. James McKeith.'

'Patty,' she replied. 'Patty Belleville.'

She waited for the reaction, but he just shook her hand and asked if she minded if he smoked. She said no and he reached inside the top pocket of his shirt for his cigarettes. Patty was shocked that he didn't recognise her. Where had he been living?

'So are you here with your family?' she asked.

'Alone. I've been living in Kenya for the past twenty years, running a nature reserve. When my wife died last year, I lost all enthusiasm for it. Friends filled my head with nonsense and said I should write about my adventures and stupid old fool that I am, I fell for it and decided to sell up and come back to Ireland to do it.'

'You're from around here?'

'Knocknacarra.'

'Well, I'm a writer, maybe I can give you some tips.'

'I'd like that,' he smiled. 'Maybe I'll see you again tomorrow Patty?'

'Yes. Say, this time?'

‘Sounds good to me.’

They smiled once more and headed off in separate directions. Patty smiled to herself; James seemed like a nice man who didn’t even know who she was, so he’d have no expectations. Maybe Ireland wouldn’t be such a lonely place after all.

After walking Orla and Finlay for over an hour, she turned and headed back to the house. She hoped she might bump into James again, but it wasn’t to be. Instead she looked forward to their rendezvous tomorrow. With a spring in her step, she entered the house, the dogs running off through the grand entrance hall, with its curved staircase and chandelier, to the kitchen for a much needed drink. Patty set about removing her Wellington boots and made up her mind to get on with some more writing. When the reception room door opened and Colm came out, it made her jump.

‘There’s someone here to see you,’ he said. ‘A young girl.’

‘Is it Rorie or Dana?’

‘No, she says she’s called Melody.’

‘I don’t know anyone called Melody. Okay, I’ll see her. You couldn’t make me a cup of tea could you Colm?’

‘What did your last servant die of?’ he laughed. ‘Course I will. I’ll make a pot. The young lass is English, I’m guessing she’s had quite a journey.’

Patty opened the door to the reception room to find a pretty young woman with a head of fluffy blonde hair sitting on the sofa. Patty didn’t recognise her at all.

‘Can I help you?’ she asked.

‘I’m sorry for gatecrashing your house Miss Belleville,’ the girl said. ‘But my father has only recently told me he knew you.’

‘Your father?’

‘William Morton.’

‘William? Oh how wonderful. You’re his daughter.’

‘Yes. When the interview you did was in the paper, father told us that he used to know you as a child, and I was fascinated. I love the Jezebel Cole books and it’s amazing to think my dad knew the woman who created her.’

Patty sat beside Melody. Looking at her closely. It was obvious she was William’s daughter. She had the same kind, blue eyes and that naturally light blonde hair.

‘How did you find me?’

‘Sasha, your daughter gave me your address. Is that okay?’

‘Yes of course, it’s always nice to meet my fans. Are you staying here in Ireland?’

‘I live in Dublin. I’m at University College. I flew here on the hop, hoping you’d see me. I have a proposition I’d like to put to you.’

‘Ooh what’s that?’

‘I’m doing English Lit. My tutor is a bit of a free-thinker, and for our final year’s project, we can either deconstruct a classic English novel and re-write it in a different style, or else we can write our own novel. Well I’ve written stories since I was a little girl and I’d love to write my own novel. And I’d love to write a book about you.’

‘Me! But that would be a biography darling, not a novel.’

‘But I want to write it as a novel and I want to write it with you as Jezebel Cole.’

‘My goodness. You want me to give you Jezebel?’

‘Just for this novel, and it’ll never be published, I promise. It’s just for my thesis. I think your life is fascinating. I’d write about everything; your childhood; your relationship with Sasha’s father, the prostitution, everything.’

‘Well we’d have to run it past my publishers, as they own the rights to my books, but I shouldn’t think it would be a problem. I read a book the other week about Elizabeth Bennett and Mr Darcy, imagining their married life. It certainly wasn’t written by Jane Austen! Ok, why not? What are you thinking of calling this book of yours?’

‘It could only be called one thing,’ Melody smiled. ‘The *True* Tale of Jezebel Cole.’

The End.

Also by this author

Summerset

Mad About the Boy

Two Become One

Mrs Osbourne Regrets

Winner Takes It All

Only You

Maudie (The Line of Passion Trilogy book 1)

Kate (The Line of Passion Trilogy book 2)

Julia (The Line of Passion Trilogy book 3)

Never Forget

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