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No Place to Hide

Written by Susan Lewis

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Susan Lewis

No Place To Hide



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Chapter One

'Hope' is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops – at all . . .

Emily Dickinson

Present Day – Culver, Indiana

So this was what it was like beyond the corn-silk veil.

Others called it a curtain, but she preferred veil. This allowed for a more dreamlike connection between the blue skies and still waters of this hauntingly beautiful town, and the world out there, filled with cornfields, highways, cities, oceans – the world, the family, she'd left behind.

To get here she'd flown through storms and time zones, driven for mile after mile across vast swathes of farmland, forests, and yet more farmland, taking perfectly straight roads through the heart of it all. She'd passed poor and jumbled communities, stopped in flashy highway oases, spotted birds of prey swooping and soaring Icarus-like to the sun, and all the time she'd wondered what kind of a place she was heading towards.

It wasn't anything like she'd expected. It was a town of many contrasts, hidden stories, troubled history, settled on a lake that glistened like a lost jewel in the middle of nowhere.

It was the second week of September now. Summer was officially over, though the sun continued to warm the immaculate streets, and flowers bloomed as eagerly as the birds sang. The tourists who'd swelled the population to many times its normal size throughout the season had vanished with Labor Day, leaving the place as tranquil, as perfect as a photograph, and for long moments at a time as still.

Justine Cantrell was standing at the edge of Lake Maxinkuckee, her bare feet sinking into gritty sand, her fine, honey-coloured curls bobbing on a wayward breeze. The sunlight was so bright on the water that she had to narrow her green eyes to peer across to the opposite shore, perhaps two miles distant. The magnificent multimillion-dollar mansions nestling amongst the greenery were barely visible from here.

'Are you crazy?' Matt, her husband, had protested when she'd told him where she was going. 'You can't.'

'Where else would you suggest?' she'd countered quietly.

'I don't know, but so far . . . Justine, you're not thinking straight.'

She could almost have smiled at that. 'Are you?' she'd asked.

He didn't answer, because they both knew he wasn't.

Neither of them could, and probably never would again.

'It's been so many years,' he'd stated, as if she didn't

know. 'You have no family there now. You don't know anyone to help you get started.'

'Isn't that the point? To go to a place where no one knows me?'

She could hear their conversation as though the rippling water spread out before her was carrying it to her across the miles, sighing its meaning, its pain and hopelessness into the very depths of her heart.

Eighteen Years Earlier – London, UK

'They're here!' Matt called out as the entryphone's buzzer rang down the hall.

In the bedroom Justine smiled, not only because of how pleased Matt always was to see his brother – he was already opening the front door and shouting down the four flights of stairs to ask if Simon needed any help – but because of the way thirteen-month-old Abby began bouncing gleefully on the bed. It was debatable what Abby loved most in the world, visitors, since she was nothing if not Miss Sociable, or music. And it was music of just about any kind, they were rapidly discovering, for they could play her virtually anything from Dire Straits to Billie Holiday to Blur and she'd either dance in her awkward toddler way, or try to sing along, or simply sit with Matt and listen, appearing rapt.

In spite of being almost nine months pregnant, Justine managed to scoop up their adorable daughter, who instantly shrieked 'Dada!' and shot out her chubby arms.

Matt was standing in the bedroom doorway, his

deep-set smoky grey eyes shining with love as he took Abby into one arm and put the other around Justine.

He was a little over six feet tall, had a loose, rangy physique, and thick, dark hair that curled wilfully around his high cheekbones and slender neck. Though he was undeniably good-looking, at least to her mind, it was his remarkable eyes with their flecks of violet and lazy glimmer of intrigue that had drawn her to him when they'd first met as students. There was also his smile, so captivatingly radiant it had actually made her blink.

She loved everything about him, and knew what he loved about her: the silky honey tones of her hair, the riot of freckles that darkened her creamy skin, the throaty laugh that encouraged his jokes, the way she embraced his impulsiveness, and often matched it with a spontaneity of her own.

Almost since they'd become a couple everyone had wanted to be around them. Their enthusiasm, recklessness, sheer *joie de vivre* was as infectious as their generosity. By the time they married, at the age of twenty-two, it already felt as though they'd known each other all their lives.

With his degrees in politics and Arabic Matt's internship with the BBC news channel had soon resulted in a permanent position, while Justine started her working life as a teaching assistant at a nearby primary school, mainly to fill time until their first child – conceived around the time of the wedding – came into the world. Her qualifications in drama and business studies would always come in handy further down the line; what mattered for now was

giving their unexpected little treasure the very best start in life.

Abby was certainly thriving in the love that surrounded her. However, her speedy growth, and a new baby on its way in a couple of weeks, meant there was simply no way this cramped attic flat at the top of a four-storey town house in south London was going to be able to contain them all. It didn't even have a lift, nor could it boast a second bedroom, nor enough space for anything more than was already crowding the open-plan kitchen-cum-sitting room.

'Where is everyone?' Simon shouted, coming in through the front door.

Laughing, Matt planted a kiss on Justine's forehead, and carried Abby out to the sitting room where her aunt Gina was starting to unload their sixteenth-month-old son, Wesley, from the carrier on his daddy's back.

With no preamble Simon declared, 'We've got just the place for you guys. OK, I know you don't want to look right now with the baby being so close, but it's not going to stay on the market for long.' He shrugged the carrier off and smiled at Justine as she came into the room. 'You know where I'm talking about. Have you got the details?' he asked Gina.

'Give me a chance,' she replied, setting Wesley on his feet and watching him make his way straight to Abby's playhouse. 'It's in the envelope at the top of my bag.' To Justine she said, 'How are you? The baby's going to pop out any minute by the look of you.'

'Please,' Justine implored, rubbing her massively swollen belly.

'And here's my little angel,' Gina smiled, taking Abby from Matt.

'Mum, mum,' Abby murmured in response, and gave a whoop of delight as her aunt swung her up in the air.

'You're such a pretty girl,' Gina said gently, smoothing her wispy blonde curls.

Abby drew back to look at her, showed every one of her new white teeth in a beguiling grin and promptly waved her fists in the air.

'So where is this place?' Matt was asking as he took the estate agent's details from Simon.

Simon grinned. Unlike his brother, he was almost as fair-haired and blue-eyed as his wife, though his and Matt's features and height were similar, as was their zest for life. 'You tell me,' he chuckled, clearly enjoying the moment.

As he looked at the property details Matt frowned in confusion, before raising his eyebrows in amazement. 'You're not serious,' he said to his brother.

'Absolutely,' Simon confirmed.

Gina gave a laugh of excitement.

Intrigued, Justine took the details from Matt and experienced a bolt of astonishment as she recognised the house for sale.

'You're kidding,' she said to Gina.

'Honest to God, hand on my heart, this isn't a joke,' Gina assured her. 'OK, I know you weren't thinking of moving out of London, but you'd get so much more for your money if you did, and it's not an impossible commute for Matt. Plus, you'd be *our neighbours*. That surely has to seal it.'

It was definitely a bonus.

Justine's eyes went to Matt, who was clearly finding it as hard as she was to take this in.

'You said yourself, when we sneaked a look round it last month,' Gina continued, 'that it was your dream place, or would be when the renovation was complete. Well, it's kind of done now, and I can tell you, you're going to more than love it. It's straight out of *Grand Designs*, but homelier, more liveable. The way you thought it should be.'

'But what happened?' Justine wanted to know, glancing at Matt again and wondering if he was starting to feel the same flutters of excitement that she was. But it was hopeless; this place was so way out of their league that she had to wonder what sort of income Simon and Gina thought they were on to imagine they could afford it. 'I thought the owners were fixing it up for themselves,' she said to Gina.

'That was the plan, but apparently the wife's mother is sick so they've decided to move close to her which is somewhere up north – Carlisle I think.'

Justine could hardly believe that a couple would put so much effort into creating a dream home, only to abandon it the minute it was ready.

'It's a fabulous place,' Matt declared, responding to Abby's outstretched arms and settling her on his hip, 'but we have to get real here, we'd never be able to afford it.'

Justine only wished she could disagree.

'I know, let's jump in the cars and go take another look,' Gina suggested rashly. 'We can stay at our place tonight instead of camping out here, and if you end

up deciding to go for it . . . Well, I'm sure something can be worked out.'

So that was what they did, and a little more than two hours later they were driving in separate cars through the quaintly crooked village of Chippingly Moor, passing its two old-fashioned pubs either side of the high street, the post office-cum-mini mart, Susie the hairdresser's, and three different types of gift shops. Further on were a couple of fashion boutiques, a florist, two charity shops, a butcher, a baker and even an actual candlestick maker, who supplied many of the nation's major department stores.

Turning off right between an insurance agency and Ruby's flower shop, they descended sharply around a bend. Passing a kitchen showroom and a dozen or more old stone cottages either side of the street, they wound on round another bend and arrived at the humpback bridge that unofficially marked the start of Chippingly Vale. To the left of the bridge, after Brook Cottage, was the entrance to the walled-in park, to the right was a narrow road that snaked randomly around more cottages before branching off up the hill to where Simon and Gina's small Victorian villa enjoyed views of the vale.

Straight ahead, at the top of a steep, grassy bank was the magnificent farmhouse – the dream home – that Justine would kill to own . . .

Present Day – Culver, Indiana

In spite of the sun, Justine shivered as her mind drew a veil over the past and gently reconnected her with her surroundings. The lake was quiet, so quiet she

might have been the only person around. The roaring speedboats and jet-skis that had chopped up the waters all summer were under awnings now; no fishermen were throwing lines, at least not today; there was barely even the sound of a passing car behind her making its way along Lakeshore Drive.

In the next bay of the lake, hidden from where she was standing, were the imposing Culver Academies that formed, arguably, one of the nation's most exclusive boarding schools for boys and girls. She'd learned the other day that the Equestrian Centre often provided the sleek black horses and straight-backed riders for presidential inaugurations. It was hard not to be impressed by that, and by the dazzling number of billionaire alumni the place could boast.

There was nothing like this in the world she'd left behind.

Though the Academy wouldn't, or shouldn't, affect her life in any way, she often saw the students, smart in their uniforms, easy in their freedoms, milling about downtown, lunching at Café Max, shopping in one of the Main Street boutiques, or heading over to the elementary school to help run the after-hours boys' and girls' club.

Thinking of children brought her heart to an abrupt halt.

Where was Tallulah?

She glanced around in panic until she remembered that her three-, almost four-year-old, daughter wasn't with her today. Leaving her at day care for the first time since arriving in Culver had been a terrible wrench, so bad that Justine had felt the trauma of

separation like a physical tearing inside. Only she had felt it. Lula was sunny and brave, chatty, bursting with the excitement of meeting new friends.

'She's going to settle in very well,' Felicity Rodnam, Director of the Child Care Ministry, had assured her, taking Lula's hand and smiling playfully into her eager eyes. Justine had melted at the look Lula had given in response. How could anyone not adore her beautiful, impish, enthusiastic little angel of a child, with her fluffy tangle of strawberry-blonde curls and pixie face?

Every mother thought their child was irresistible, she understood that, but not every mother had so many complex and conflicting emotions threatening to undermine the love of that child.

Tallulah wasn't to blame.

Justine knew that in her heart and in her head, but still the thought, the horror, rose up like a demon in unguarded moments to wreck the inner peace she was trying so hard for – the peace that she must attain or she would surely lose her mind.

How could she wish the most precious little person in her life had never been born? Even if she hadn't, would it really have made a difference?

Inhaling the clear, fresh air, she allowed her gaze to drift to the buoys further out in the bay, there to warn swimmers to go no further. She and Lula had swum a lot this past month, not only here at the beach, but at the south shore of the lake, closer to their home.

Enjoying the spectacle of a heron coming to land on the jetty nearby she waited for it to fly on, deciding she would leave when it did. It seemed to be in no hurry, but nor was she. She was telling herself, gently,

that she had no need to feel fear, or apprehension, longing or shame. She could lose herself in the tranquillity of this vast, shimmering lake, in the promise of escape, the chance of shedding her old self like a second skin and becoming somebody else.

It was starting to happen.

A new name. A new beginning.

All the same, memories of her previous life kept rolling across the miles, as though to gather her up and return her to that fateful day when she and Matt had made the impulsive drive to Chippingly Vale.

Eighteen Years Earlier – Chippingly Vale

'I'm almost afraid to go in,' Justine whispered as she and Matt approached the old farmhouse. 'If we do, we might never leave.'

'I know what you mean,' he murmured, his dark eyes tense with purpose as he took in the rambling old place with its freshly restored limestone window frames, rebuilt chimneys and gleaming red front door. It looked so stately, yet settled and inviting, on the brow of the vale, so full of promise and cheer, that Justine could almost believe it was calling to them.

Because they'd tramped around the grounds the last time they were there she knew there were potential grassy gardens either side of the house, a cobbled courtyard and three old barns ripe for conversion at the back, plus an overgrown vegetable patch, a fully stocked orchard in much need of attention, and acres of farmland beyond that dipped and flowed, thrust and tumbled into the hazy distance. Who wouldn't want to bring their children up in such an idyllic West

Country setting that wasn't much more than an hour by train to London, and tucked in behind the thriving village of Chippingly Moor?

By the time they returned to London on Sunday evening Matt was so convinced the place should be theirs that he'd already left a message on the agent's answerphone saying he wanted to make an offer.

'Keep visualising,' he told Justine. 'Keep seeing us in it and somehow it'll happen.'

So that was what she'd done throughout the following two weeks, even while giving birth to their son, Ben. It was where she wanted to bring him up, so somehow they had to make the place theirs. Even if it broke the bank now, which it would, it was definitely their forever home, so they simply didn't care how hard they might have to struggle for the first few years. Why should they when everything about the house felt right? In the spacious kitchen the original flagstone flooring had been restored and replaced, and a shiny black Aga had been tucked snugly into a niche next to the fireplace. There was a vast centre island with a salad sink, extra storage and built-in wine racks, and still plenty of room for a dining table and even a sofa. At the far end of the ground floor was the perfect study-cum-library for Matt, with walls already full of shelving, a small cast-iron hearth in a corner and a view from the double French doors down over the steep grassy bank in front of the house to the park at the heart of the vale. At the other end was an ideal space for a children's playroom that opened on to a side yard that they could easily lay to lawn and cover with trampolines, slides, swings and see-saws. A large

sitting room with arched sash windows at the front and back and huge inglenook fireplace was between the kitchen and study, while a massive oak staircase rose from the entrance hall to a bedroom each for the children with two more for guests, and a master suite for Justine and Matt that was so spacious and luxurious she hardly knew how she was going to fill it.

They soon learned from the agent that their first offer had been refused. So was the second. Then someone put in a bid that Justine and Matt had no hope of matching.

Their dream was being crushed by a stranger.

Could they really let that happen?

There had to be a way. The house simply had to be theirs, no matter what . . .

Present Day – Culver, Indiana

Justine's heart fluttered as the sound of a speedboat starting up further along the shore brought her back to the lake. Nevertheless, it still took a moment for her to fully remember where she was – and why.

They used to come to Culver for summer vacations as children, she and her younger brother Rob. They'd lived close to New Hope, Pennsylvania then. Their busy parents, Camilla and Tom, used to hand them over to Camilla's mother, Grandma May, each June to make the long drive across country to the summer house on Lake Maxinkuckee – or Lake Max as it was more generally known. Neither Justine nor Rob had any clear memories now of the times they'd spent here; they'd stopped coming around the time Justine was six, Rob four. Their father's job had taken the family

to London, and as far as either Justine or Rob could remember Grandma May had never come to visit them there, nor had they ever returned to Lake Max.

Justine wished she could remember her grandma. She felt sure there had been a special bond between them – why else would Lake Max have presented itself so clearly when she'd realised she had to leave England and start again somewhere else, to become somebody else? It had felt as though her grandma was calling to her, telling her she'd be safe here; that she wouldn't have to worry about anything ever again.

Grandma May had passed on some thirty years ago when Justine was around twelve, but that didn't mean Justine couldn't feel her spirit lingering today, watching from somewhere close by, understanding her and caring. Imagined or not, it helped her to feel less alone. She wished she could picture the old lady in her mind's eye, or hear distant echoes of her voice, but she couldn't. She was sure there used to be photographs of her around their London home, but she had no idea where they were now. Presumably with her mother, Camilla, at Camilla's elegant town house in Chelsea, or perhaps at her country pile in Hampshire, though they weren't on display in either of those places either. Camilla never talked about her mother. There again Camilla rarely talked about anything other than gardening, her passion and claim to fame.

'Oh, hell, Justine, I don't know where those pictures are now,' she'd sighed when Justine had asked for them a few months ago. 'Why are you even interested?'

'Because I've decided to go and live by the lake.'

Her mother's eyes had widened at that, not so much

with surprise as something that had seemed like alarm. 'You surely don't mean Lake Maxinkuckee?' she'd protested.

'Yes, that's where I mean.'

Camilla's stare hardened. 'I understand your reasons for leaving,' she'd finally managed, 'but why on earth would you go to a place you don't even know?'

'Isn't that the point? To go where no one knows me?' Justine said, repeating what she'd said to Matt when she'd told him of her decision.

'But why *there*?'

'Give me one good reason why not there.'

Camilla's fleshy cheeks flushed with confusion. 'Because there's nothing there for you,' she cried. 'It's all gone, years ago, and no good will ever come out of running back to a place you can't even remember.'

'I'm not expecting a home to be waiting for me. I realise I'll have to rent a place at first . . .'

'You've got the whole world to choose from . . .'

'And I've made my choice. Exactly why is it a problem, Mother?'

Camilla drew back, as though offended.

Justine waited, her eyes holding the challenge.

Camilla turned away. 'I've already agreed that you need a fresh start,' she said, 'and I'll support you in any way I can, but please, do yourself a favour and forget about Lake Max.'

Had her father still been alive Justine would have sought his advice – or his opinion, anyway – but he'd died suddenly when she was in her late teens. By then her parents had been divorced for at least seven years. Justine and Rob had always remained close to their

father, even after he'd moved to Seville with his new Spanish wife.

Camilla had married again too. In fact she was now on her fourth husband, Bill.

The last time Justine and Camilla had spoken was when Justine had rung to say goodbye. 'I've sent you my new email address,' she'd told her mother. 'Please don't pass it to anyone else.'

'Of course not,' Camilla promised. 'Rob tells me you've already rented an apartment in Culver while you look for something more permanent.'

Her mother sounded so peeved and agitated that Justine said, 'Would you rather I stayed here, in England? Perhaps I should move in with you. That would be fun, wouldn't it, us all under the same roof, sharing your precious garden?'

'Don't do this, Justine,' Camilla implored. 'You know coming to me wouldn't be the answer . . .'

'It would damage your reputation.'

'It's damaged all our reputations.'

Justine had rung off at that point, not wanting her mother to know she was crying.

Only Matt had witnessed the tears.

'Please don't go,' he'd begged, the day she'd booked the flights to Chicago.

'We agreed, I have to, for Tallulah's sake.'

'But I can't bear to think of you so far away.'

'No more contact between us,' she'd reminded him, her heart breaking into a thousand pieces as she connected with the real meaning of the words. 'It's for the best.'

Though they'd gone round and round in circles that

day, as they had on so many other occasions, talking things through in every possible way, seeking advice from Rob and his wife, Maggie, from the police and an army of counsellors, that was where it always ended, because as far as they could see it was the only way.

Justine had to leave. She needed to make a new home for herself and Lula, and since she was American by birth it made sense, at least to her, to return to her roots.

She could have chosen New Hope, Pennsylvania, but she hadn't, because she'd felt sure that Culver, Indiana was where her grandma wanted her to be. Of course, as a ghost, Grandma May would never be able to fill Matt's place – no one, living or dead, could ever do that – but in a quietly instinctive way Justine knew she'd made the right decision.

How she ached for Matt now, for everything that had once been theirs, the home, the friends, the dreams, the safety, the countless things they'd taken for granted.

One day – a few single moments in the day – had brought it all to an end.

Except that wasn't how it had happened. It had been coming for a long time, but no one had wanted to see it and by the time they had it was too late.

Stop, stop! You need to let go, to forgive yourself and start afresh.

The flimsy fabric of her dress floated around her knees like ripples in the breeze; her normally pale skin had turned golden in the summer sun. There were lines around her once lively green eyes bearing the unreadable story of her grief; shadows darkened their

rims like spectres, palpable evidence of long, difficult nights during which sleep was rarely a friend.

Yet there were still moments when she could smile and feel her heart lifting at the beauty of nature, at how blessed she was in Tallulah and being able to make her home in this unexpected delight of a small town.

Lake Maxinkuckee had got its name from its first inhabitants, the Potawatomi Indians. She and Matt had found that little nugget on Wikipedia several years ago when they'd toyed with the idea of visiting the place for a family holiday. Camilla had immediately discouraged it. In fact she hadn't seen any point in them returning to the States at all, when there were still so many places in Europe and the rest of the world to discover. Camilla, who'd never lost her American accent in spite of being a committed Anglophile now, was nothing if not expert at tearing up roots. She did it at least once a week, in a literal sense, usually for an audience of thousands who tuned in to her highly rated afternoon TV show. Glamorous, erudite, flirtatious and undeniably gifted in her field – actually her garden – Camilla Gayley was nothing short of a goddess when it came to horticultural planning and landscape management.

That was what the press called her, the Green-fingered Goddess.

She was also something of a socialite, had a column in a national newspaper, and an Internet site that received hundreds, possibly thousands of hits a day. She was as active as a teenager on Facebook and Twitter, was forever posting selfies with the many

celebrities she entertained at her mini estate and had, only in the past year, been invited – somewhat hilariously – to pose nude for *Playboy*.

Thankfully she'd turned it down. At fifty-eight she'd decided it wouldn't be seemly. (Nor was it at sixty-four, her actual age, Justine had thought at the time, though she'd refrained from saying so.)

Being a guest on *Desert Island Discs* – which, luckily for Camilla, had aired the week before all hell had broken loose – had, for her, been some sort of high spot in her glittering career. Justine had dutifully listened, cringing at all the name-dropping and self-adulation, while raising an eyebrow at stories she strongly doubted were true. Most outrageous of all was Camilla's luxury item: a photo album of her grandchildren that her dear son Rob had put together for her fiftieth birthday.

'Lucky no one asked her their names,' Justine had remarked to Matt as the programme ended. She knew the barb was unjustified, for her mother was actually much better with the children than Justine was ready to give her credit for, although it had to be said that she didn't see them very often.

'And of course,' she'd run on irritably, 'she didn't stop to think that it was too long ago for Tallulah to be in the album.'

'Don't let it get to you,' Matt cautioned. 'Lula's too young to know the difference, and we've got plenty of other things to worry about.'

Why was she thinking about her mother now? Most likely because she was the link to her grandma, an integral part of the connection that couldn't be made

real, or completed, unless Camilla allowed it. Or maybe it was simply because she hadn't heard from her mother once since she'd arrived.

'But you told me not to be in touch,' Camilla would protest if Justine got around to calling her.

It was true, Justine had asked her not to be, but she could send emails to the new account Justine had set up, in her new name.

When making the change she'd considered going back to her maiden name, but Camilla had retained custody of that.

'Gayley isn't exactly common,' she'd pointed out, 'and I'm sorry, I don't mean this to be hurtful, but I'd really rather people forgot that you're related to me.'

'Mum, for God's sake,' Rob had cried in angry protest. 'You're not even married to Dad any more, so why don't you change your name to Bill's and let Justine do what she wants?'

'Don't be absurd. Everyone knows me as Camilla Gayley. I can't just change it when it's all over our products, programme graphics, website . . .'

'It's all right,' Justine had interrupted. 'I'll find something else.'

In the end it was as though Grandma May had come to the rescue again, offering up her own name for Justine to take. So now Justine and Lula were no longer McQuillans, they were Cantrells.

Giving up Matt's name had been devastating. The day her new documents had come through she'd felt so panicked, so truly afraid that had it not been for Lula she was sure she'd have backed out and stayed. She kept thinking of the day she'd become Justine

McQuillan. How happy she'd been; how young and in love. She loved Matt as much now as she had back then. More. Much, much more, although that wouldn't have seemed possible at the start when her feelings had been so strong, and her determination so fierce, that she'd taken matters into her own hands to get them the farmhouse they so desperately wanted.

Eighteen Years Earlier – London, UK

Justine was in her mother's elegant study overlooking the Victorian lamp posts and leafy gardens of Chelsea Embankment. Camilla's severe, though attractive, face was already made up prior to a lunch engagement, her short fair hair combed to within a millimetre of perfection.

She'd expressed no surprise when her husband, Bill, had showed Justine into the room, nor had she raised an eyebrow when Justine had told her why she was there. She'd simply taken the estate agent's details, given them a slow lookover and passed them back again.

'I can see its appeal,' she stated, crossing one silk-stockinged leg over the other, 'but you'll never be able to afford to heat it, never mind buy it.'

Biting back a cutting retort, Justine said, 'We've worked it all out, and OK, it'll be tight at first, we might only be able to live in one part of it, but they're talking about making Matt an editor at work and if I can get a business going . . .'

'What sort of business?'

'I want to open a deli.'

Camilla's eyebrows rose. 'Mm,' she commented shortly, either not taking it seriously, or saving her

opinion for another time. 'Twelve thousand pounds is a lot of money. Are you intending to pay me back?'

'I asked for a loan, not a gift,' Justine reminded her. 'We'll set up a standing order. It won't be much at first, but . . .'

Camilla's hand went up. 'You can pay it back when you have it. I don't want it turning up in dribs and drabs. It would be too annoying.'

Justine regarded her steadily.

'I'll give you the money,' Camilla continued, 'because it's only fair that you should have the same as Rob, which means the cheque I write will be for twenty thousand pounds, not twelve.'

Justine was dumbfounded. 'You gave Rob twenty thousand pounds?' she finally gasped.

'To help him and Maggie buy the house in Brentford. So it wouldn't reflect well on me if I didn't do the same for you.'

Still stunned by the news that her brother had received such an enormous sum and never mentioned it, Justine wasn't quite sure what to say. 'Have they . . .? Are they paying you back?' she asked.

'I hope so, though I haven't seen a penny of it yet and it's been over two years.'

Wondering if she'd ever have found out about the loan if she hadn't asked for one herself, Justine, determined not to be petty about favouritism, managed to say, 'I can assure you Matt and I will repay every last cent of whatever you choose to give us, and with interest if you'd like to set a rate.'

Sighing impatiently, Camilla took out her chequebook, saying, 'Shall I make it out to you or Matt?'

'Either or both. We have a joint account.'

Camilla's smile showed what she thought of such foolishness.

'Can I call Matt now to tell him?' Justine asked as her mother handed the cheque over.

Waving her to the phone, Camilla said, 'I'll expect to be invited once in a while.'

'Of course, as often as you like,' Justine assured her, starting to dial. 'And thank you. I really . . . I mean, it's hard to find the words . . .'

'Then don't try. I know you're grateful. In your shoes, I would be too.'

And so, with not a single thought for being careful of what they wished for, they were finally in a position to buy the house of their dreams.