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Damaged Goods

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Extract

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PROLOGUE

He was shit scared. Him, Valentine Waite, who'd never been afraid of any man either in the boxing ring or out of it.

He kicked the soft peaty soil against the side of the well as he hoisted up the slight body of the girl, then set her to rest on the weather-worn circle of red brick. One small hand, fingers covered with cheap rings, swung from her lifeless form as though plucking at the dirt.

'Slag,' he muttered, lifting the rope from the ground and looping it around her body.

Remembering, he gave a small laugh that eased the tension inside him. The girl had been easily lured to Wickham Woods with the promise of more money than she'd usually get for a quick fuck. He'd picked her up, befuddled with booze, from outside the Portsmouth Guildhall. She'd recognised him almost immediately.

'You look just like that bleedin' boxer, what's 'is name,' she'd slurred. 'Valentine White, innit?'

'Lots of people tell me that.' He flicked at the miniature black leather boxing gloves hanging from his inside mirror. 'And it's Waite, not White.' Already this dumb bitch had annoyed him. She would be easy to get rid of.

Daisy Lane might not be such easy prey.

In another couple of weeks the clocks would be going forward for British Summer Time 1966, and the protection of dark evenings would be denied him. Picking up Daisy Lane during daylight hours wasn't what he wanted at all.

The girl had asked, 'Where we goin'?'

'Does it matter?' He'd thrown a handful of notes at her and she'd scrabbled in her lap as though scared he might take the

money back again. She'd shut up then, stroked the inside of his thighs, slipped her fingers inside his flies.

'Don't make me come, let's get to the woods. You deserve better than a car quickie,' he'd said, pacifying, while hating the smell of her. Body odour undisguised by perfume, and the sharp scent of gin on her breath. She'd left him alone then, lighting up a Woodbine and filling his car with smoke.

Wickham Woods was deserted; he'd guessed as much. He pulled into the parking area and a cool breeze met him as he opened the car door. The fresh air would tease the pale skin of the girl's cheeks to a pink blush, he thought, as they strolled down the dirt path.

'You must come 'ere a lot,' she said, her ridiculous heels making her stumble on the soft earth.

'I know the area. Used to be a house here but now there's only the ruins,' he'd said. 'And the well. It's the kind of place you'd pass by and not really notice.'

'It's creepy,' she gasped, stepping closer to him for comfort. A bird, a collared dove, disturbed by the noise of their presence, flew from the trees, closely followed by its mate. The girl was shivering and he pulled her close, then down onto the primrose-covered forest floor.

'Take those things off,' he'd said. She'd wriggled out of her knickers and lay back, letting her legs fall open, and he was upon her.

Afterwards, he despised himself. And her.

It hadn't taken long to choke her.

She was no match for him. He'd felt the intensity of knowing he could do as he wanted. She'd cried as she urinated, the sharp smell mingling with the sweeter evening scents.

'Don't, don't . . .' She'd continued to say the words until her breath finally left her.

Looking down at her he thought of his mother and whispered, 'They're all the same as you. I have to put an end to their miseries like I put an end to yours. You should never have left me in the dark while you fucked your men. I was just a kid, and I was frightened. But now my voices tell me every new slut offered them gives me power. And I can keep a little bit of each one, like I

keep you, Mother, safe in my heart so you can never leave me again.'

He listened to the hum of the trees and it was as if the woodland sounds around him were from a different world. Then he became aware of his hands, clammy, his skin sweating. His fear had returned.

He thought about Daisy. She was like his mother, a slut of the highest order, and she'd lied to him. Just like his mother had.

He'd offered himself to her and she'd turned from him as though he was dogshit on her shoe. Turned from *him* to shack up with that fucking gangster, Roy Kemp. Almost a year he'd waited, watching, learning about her movements, and keeping out of sight, away from Gosport's prying eyes, watching that house in Western Way bought for her by that thug Eddie Lane. He knew she spent every other weekend in London with her gangster. He knew the shops she used, the walks she took with her toddler, pushing him in a blue pushchair, oblivious to anyone else in the vicinity as she chased him in Stanley Park or picked seashells with him along the shore at Stokes Bay.

But most of all, imprinted on his mind, was every road she travelled from her house to Roy Kemp's terraced property in London, in that poncy little MG of hers. He knew the hours she would leave, waving goodbye to that black-haired tart, Vera, and that plump blonde slag, Susie, and Eddie Lane's kid. How old would he be now, that little boy? Two? Two and a half? The spit of his father, the dark hair and the green eyes that seemed to take in everything and give nothing away.

He should have a boy like that child.

Maybe he would. Maybe that very same little boy . . .

Daisy should be with him, not Roy Kemp. He'd been nice to her, hadn't he? Told her she reminded him of his mother, and not only with her slight body and blonde hair. He'd paid her the highest compliment, *told her she should belong to him*. He couldn't understand why she'd walked away from him at that party in Thorngate Hall. She'd been ready enough to give herself to him before, hadn't she? Then she changed her mind.

It messed his head up. He was ready to love her and she'd said it

was all a *mistake*. He'd show her how much of a mistake she'd made.

And yet here he was, frightened. For at long last, this weekend, she would be his.

Valentine Waite ran his fingers through his hair and looked down at the girl's body. Momentarily he'd forgotten about her. Crouching, he extracted the money he'd given her from her grubby plastic handbag, then dropped the purse down the well. It was a long time before he heard the object hit the water. Then he took from her his usual souvenir, smiling as he slipped it and the small sharp instrument back into his wallet. He tied a rope around her body and slipped it over the supporting beams beneath the remains of the well's thatched roof. He pulled on the rope and the dead girl dangled above the dank-smelling void. He lashed the rope securely to the wooden struts.

She hung grotesquely inside the dome of weatherbeaten thatch, her inert arms and legs swaying. She was facing downwards. He put his thumbs on her eyes, trying to close them. The lids remained open, accusing. He secured her wrists and then her ankles to the rafters with cord from his pockets and stood back, surveying his handiwork. It was exactly as he had planned: spreadeagled, she would stare forever down into the depths of the well, invisible to passers-by. People stared *down* a well. He smiled. How long would it be before someone looked up?

'Why don't you marry the bleeder?'

'Don't call Roy names, Vera.' Daisy pulled at a dandelion that broke off, leaving its root in the soil. 'Sod it! Pass me the pronged thingy.' She took the small gardening fork offered by Vera and began digging furiously. 'Gotcha!' Grimy fingers dangled the root in front of Vera. 'Bloody things.'

'They're God's flowers,' Vera said, 'and I'm fed up with this weedin' lark, it'll play merry hell with me back. I'll ask you again, Missy. Why won't you at least move in with the bloke?'

Daisy sat back on her heels and sighed.

'I like this house. I don't want to live in that poky little house Roy lives in with 'is mum in London. Besides, I like me freedom. I

can sleep with him then come home, or he can come down 'ere for the weekend and sleep with me, and I can send him on his way afterwards . . .'

'What you mean is you don't feel you're hurting Moira if you ain't actually living with 'im?'

'She's still in that sanatorium in Spain and she don't even know what bleedin' day it is . . .'

'He could divorce her.'

'No!'

'Said that a bit quick, didn't you, Dais?'

'We're all right as we are. I like me freedom.' Daisy pulled at a piece of toughened grass that unravelled like knitting wool. The truth was she really did cherish being her own woman, as well as having a powerful man like Roy Kemp in the background. She looked at Vera, leaning back to ease her spine. 'Don't give up on this gardening lark yet, Vera. We could have the front done before teatime. Look at these daffodils, ain't they lovely?'

Vera sniffed. Daisy smiled at her and saw Vera melt.

'Give us that bleedin' fork then.'

In companionable silence they worked the flowerbed behind the privet hedge inside the wide gravel drive that led to Western Way. Buds were on the rose bushes and already the flowering cherry was in blossom. Best of all the flowers Daisy loved the daffs, the bright yellows making her feel winter was finally over.

'You off to 'im this weekend?'

'I am, Vera.'

'I'll take little Eddie out. You wearin' that new black minidress? The one you bought down Fleur's?'

'I am, Vera.'

'Is it that benefit thing Reggie and Ronnie Kray fixed up to help the Boys' Club in Kingston?'

'It is, Vera, An' now, if the bleedin' interrogation is over, can we get on with this fuckin' weeding?'

Vera's face had sunk in on itself like a week-old cabbage. Daisy was sure her friend's eyes were just a little too bright and she felt a pang of remorse at her hastiness. Vera cared about her.

Vera unpursed her lips and stared hard.

'I only likes to know where you'll be, Daisy love.'

CHAPTER 1

'Fuck it!' Pain shot up her leg. The padlock fastening the steel band shackling her ankle just would not budge. Daisy's ankle was rubbed raw and the hairgrip she had been using to pick the padlock had slipped and pierced her already angry wound.

Daisy screwed up her eyes, trying to stop the tears squeezing out, swore again, and waited for the pain to subside a little before – her fingers shaking – replacing the bent hairgrip beneath the edge of the filthy lino. She prayed it would stay hidden from his prying eyes. She stared at the wooden skirting board where the chain was securely bolted. She'd long since given up trying to force it from its mooring.

She was a fucking prisoner.

Unable to hold back her feelings any longer, she wept. Huge sobs that she knew would go unheard, ignored. The most Daisy could hope for was that her frustration and pain would be eased by her outburst.

After a while she crawled back over the linoleum, once green with pink roses and now a mish-mash of worn felt, to the stained mattress. You have to face facts, girl, she told herself. On the few times your head is reasonably clear you still ain't strong enough to free yourself.

'Bastard, bastard Valentine Waite.' Her voice sank into the dank walls of her prison.

She touched her swollen ankle and winced anew at the pain. The skin was broken and fresh blood was oozing onto the darker, dried blood. She flexed her toes and wished she hadn't, even that small sensation hurt her. And she felt suddenly ashamed of the encrusted dirt on her feet and her own musky body smell.

The chain allowed her movement to an enamelled bucket that was her lavatory. The bucket stood in the recess beneath the stained butler sink, with its small wooden draining board that was pitted with cigarette burns and clogged with unidentified grey matter in the corners. The single tap gave dribbles of cold water.

Above this was a barred window with ivy covering part of the outside glass, which, she reasoned, would make it extremely difficult for anyone to spot that a window was there. And it cut off her light. The mattress, the bucket, the sink were her islands, the chain allowed her to navigate no further.

Sometimes she could hear loud music from below, floating into the room, the popular kind, as though from a radio. Now, the Righteous Brothers were singing 'Unchained Melody'. Daisy sniffed and wiped her hand across her eyes.

Sometimes she heard voices but she'd long ago given up screaming for help when she heard them. The penalty, if *he* was around and heard her, was another dose of the drug.

He injected it. The needle would tip her over the edge again into violent hallucinations and dreams and when she eventually came out of that haze she couldn't distinguish between reality and nightmares. She had no idea of the passing of time apart from day and night. Had she been in this room weeks or months? Logic told her it might be about four weeks and the growth of her dirty toenails seemed to agree with this. Her fingernails were torn and bloodied from hours spent trying to pick the lock, which stayed as unyielding as ever, but she had to go on hoping, didn't she? She'd lost a lot of weight. Her legs looked like white sticks. Daisy wondered if that skinny model, Twiggy, starved herself. Somehow she didn't think so, some people were naturally thin. Being slim was one thing, she thought, being starved skinny was another.

As a sort of landmark, Daisy tried to hold on to the memory of the terrible news she had heard on the radio the morning Valentine Waite had abducted her. That was her first day in this room. Those unspeakable creatures, Myra Hindley and Ian Brady, were going on trial for the appalling child murders on Saddleworth Moor. Was the trial still running or had it ended?

Thinking about her own child caused a heartache she could

barely endure. To keep her sanity she knew she had to push all thoughts of little Eddie into a room inside her brain and keep it firmly locked. But when, as now, his smiling face entered her mind all she could think of was his warm, cuddly body and his arms tight about her and her heart bled.

To dwell on whether little Eddie, too, was a prisoner of that mad bastard Valentine Waite would send her completely round the bend.

Mad bastard? Yes. For there was no doubt Valentine Waite had gone over the edge.

Daisy had read about boxers who'd become punch drunk from the battering they'd received to their heads. Sometimes this didn't happen straight away but built up gradually, causing changes of personality, often from placid to violent. But Daisy reckoned Valentine Waite was unhinged before he ever took up boxing and had somehow managed to conceal his true personality.

Daisy feared for little Eddie. Please God, she prayed, just let my son be free from harm and with my friend Vera. I don't care what happens to me if only you'll keep my son safe.

Valentine Waite rarely spoke when he visited the room. At those times, she tried to make herself as small and invisible as possible so he might leave her alone.

Whether it was the pain or the result of the needle, she welcomed sleep. And sometimes after sleeping she could, as now, gather her head and body together enough to know that she must at least try to get out of this stinking place, wherever she was, and away from *him*.

By raising herself on tiptoe and leaning across the sink she had a good view, between the bars, of the yard below and the surrounding area. Daisy was sure it was a breaker's yard. She saw a mountain of what could be rusted car parts, some dropped in puddles of rainbow-coloured oil which glittered when the sun shone. In one corner badly stacked tyres threatened to topple over.

There was some sort of crusher machine that was used regularly and noisily by an old man wearing a flat cap. The rusted and sometimes badly smashed cars which she presumed might have been involved in accidents were creakily hoisted high by a giant

claw to somewhere she couldn't quite see and later returned as uneven metal squares that were dropped into an iron container.

The whole yard seemed to be surrounded by dense walls made from thick wooden railway sleepers. Beyond the sleepers Daisy could just make out some allotments that mostly seemed abandoned, and a couple of rusted air-raid shelters covered with brambles that were used as sheds. Daisy once saw a man with a small boy discarding an old pram and had shouted until her throat hurt, but of course they had neither heard nor seen her. She knew there was also a train track nearby because she sometimes heard the rattle of the carriage wheels on the lines and the shrill whistles.

The man in the yard shuffled as though he were drunk or had something wrong with his knees that meant being upright was painful for him. He kept his eyes downwards as though fearing he might slip and fall. She'd thought of breaking the window to attract his attention but the glass was beyond her reach and there was nothing in the room she could use to push through the bars. Perhaps he was deaf, or had been told to ignore her.

She'd sleep and dream. Dream and sleep. And when she was lucid she was petrified of the moment when Valentine Waite would unlock the door.

On the draining board was a threadbare towel, a flannel, a cake of Fairy soap, a round block of Gibbs dentifrice and a toothbrush. Daisy mostly kept herself clean but had chosen not to bother with the flannel, a stinking rag, preferring instead to use her hands beneath the dripping tap. The towel was no longer clean either and was starting to reek as bad as the flannel. She'd had a period and had ripped up part of the towel to use as pads, which she'd thrown in the bucket when they were soiled. She was wearing the same underwear, black skirt and black polo neck jumper she'd had on the day she had been brought to the room.

Daisy did sometimes try to fight against Waite, to escape the syringe and put off the vomiting and nausea that always followed, but he held her until her resistance evaporated. Then, terrified of his punches and unable to avoid his hands on her body, she was forced to let him do what he wanted. Sometimes she was just too confused or depressed to care.

Sometimes the dreams and vivid colours gave her a sense of weightlessness so that she could lift herself out of her body and watch as he fucked the blonde creature on the bed then wandered about the dimly lit room after he had finished with the girl. The girl, she knew, was really herself.

When he did utter the odd sentence or two, she knew it wasn't her he was speaking to, or even thinking about.

He was mad. Quite, quite mad. Daisy had read of people who were insane but able to function often as extremely clever people, until the madness took over. They showed a personality to the world that was seemingly normal yet hid an inward personality that listened to voices and believed they were chosen: chosen to restore balance to the world and those around them by doing as the voices requested. And if the voices told them to do things which normal people would never dream of, then so what? Weren't they protected by their gods, or the voices inside their heads, and convinced they heard praise and atonement?

Daisy shuddered. She couldn't deny that Valentine Waite was good looking in a boyish way; even the broken nose only added to his charm. And he was always immaculately dressed as befitted a champion boxer, folding his clothes neatly and hanging his jacket on a padded hanger that he kept on the far side of the wall where Daisy couldn't reach.

His looks and position made him a magnet for women. She herself had fallen under his spell at a party organised for him by Ronnie and Reggie Kray. How she wished now she'd never gone with Roy Kemp to that celebration.

Waite sometimes visited the room simply to sift through drawers in a desk pushed against the wall. With his back to her, she could see him carefully examining the contents of a lacquered black box, running his fingertips over whatever was inside. To this box, kept in the top drawer, she had seen him add small items, but she couldn't reach the desk to see what they were.

He brought her food. If she didn't eat in his presence, he'd take the uneaten food away with him. It was usually tinned soup with bread rolls or sandwiches. He gave her a spoon but no sharp cutlery. Only Glo left the meals in the hope that Daisy might eat later. When this happened Daisy guessed her captor might not

return for a while and Glo was instructed to make sure Daisy didn't escape.

Daisy wasn't the only one petrified of Valentine Waite.

After an injection she was sometimes given a fountain pen. Then he'd steady her hand and tell her what words to put down on the paper that blurred as the drug took effect. Afterwards she wondered if it had all been a dream.

He wasn't a careful lover. Rolling her on her back, shoving his cock into her mouth, pushing it down her throat until she gagged. And she, chained, unable to struggle against him.

Him grunting when he was inside her, grasping her like his tightened muscles might burst from his skin. Afterwards he'd slump, a dead weight on her, crying like a child and telling her she would always stay with him. That he'd keep her in his heart and in this room. And later still, he'd say, 'You made me do this.'

And he would hit her. And sometimes he called her 'Mother'.

'You awake?'

Daisy's heart leapt at the sound of the voice and the door being unlocked, then locked again after the girl had entered. Daisy opened her eyes.

Glo had a small tray with a mug and a plate of sandwiches. Daisy could smell fish. Perhaps they were bloater paste again. Daisy eyed the girl who couldn't have been more than sixteen years old.

'Help me,' she croaked. Glo's brown eyes filled with tears. She bent down, sweeping the fall of chestnut brown hair back from her eyes. She put the tray on the floor next to the mattress. Daisy saw fresh fingermarks on her skinny upper arms.

She said, 'I . . . I can't. You know that.'

Through the tangle of her own greasy hair Daisy saw the girl look away. Her eyes were like an old woman's. She was wearing jeans and a blouse. Her clothes weren't clean. Her arms were white and freckled, matching the freckles across her upturned nose set in a pale heartshaped face. To Daisy, despite her grubbiness, Glo looked and smelled fresh and clean as washing brought in straight from the line.

'You been tryin' to pick the bleedin' lock again, ain't you?'

Daisy couldn't lie. 'Yes. Please don't tell 'im.'

'You know I won't say nothing but he'll see the fresh scratch marks on the metal casing same as I did.' She looked at Daisy's mess of an ankle. 'You better let me dab some iodine on that. Don't want it getting infected.' Always the girl seemed nervous. No wonder, Daisy thought, anyone involved with Valentine Waite had a perfect right to be scared.

The girl walked to the desk and opened an unlocked drawer, bringing out a small brown bottle and a roll of cotton wool. Daisy saw she had tried the top drawer first but of course it was locked. It was always locked.

Waite trusted Glo with keys when he wasn't around, but not all the keys. And Daisy guessed Glo only did his bidding out of fear.

'Help me.' Daisy felt the tears rise again. 'He hurts you an' all.'

'If he knew I was even 'aving a bleedin' conversation with you . . .' The girl tore off a piece of cotton wool and unscrewed the bottle, allowing a trickle of the brown liquid to soak in. 'Grit your teeth, this will 'urt but it'll do the trick.' She gently dabbed the bloodied part of Daisy's skin. Daisy stifled a cry for she knew Glo was trying to help her.

'Thank you,' she whispered.

The girl had told her her name was Gloria but he called her Glo.

'I don't know why you bother to try to get the chain off. Even if you managed it, how would you get out the room? And between 'ere and downstairs is another locked door.' Glo put the iodine and cotton wool back in the drawer.

'You could leave me the keys.'

'And if I did I'd get more than a few punches. He'd fucking kill me.' She stared at Daisy and her old woman's eyes told Daisy it was only the truth.

'We could go together. I could hide you.' Glo had reached the door, had inserted the key in the lock. She turned back.

'You couldn't 'ide yourself, could you? He found you.'

The girl let herself out of the room and relocked the door.

Daisy curled herself into a ball on the stinking mattress, listening to Glo's receding footsteps.

Yes, Valentine Waite had found her.

*

It must have been nearly a year since she had spoken to him at Vera's party in the Thorngate Hall. That night on the dance floor she had told him to leave her alone, that she never wanted to see him again. She remembered the look of disbelief in his eyes.

Apart from a little flirtation once when she'd been lonely, there was nothing between them. They'd never slept together. The so-called relationship was all in his twisted mind, magnified to whatever he wanted it to be.

He had told her she was like his mother, whatever that meant. But he *had* walked away from her. And she'd not seen hide nor hair of him since that day, until . . .

Don't keep going over things in your mind, Daisy, she told herself. Thinking about it won't help, all it does is depress you. Think about Vera. But Daisy's heart hurt thinking about her friend.

Vera had been one of Gosport's more successful prostitutes, then she'd opened a massage parlour, Heavenly Bodies, and become a respected member of Gosport's community. Daisy knew Vera would be out of her mind with worry about her.

She forced herself to remember as clearly as she could that final morning after they'd heard the news on the radio about the trial of the couple dubbed the Moors Murderers. Daisy was filling her car with items she'd need for a trip to London.

'You got enough bleeding stuff there for a week, not a weekend,' Vera had said, eyeing the luggage in the open boot of Daisy's red MG Midget in the gravel driveway of her house in Western Way.

'Me an' Roy are going out to a do with Violet Kray an' 'er boys.' Daisy had stared at her friend who stood, hands on hips below a trim waist, dressed in a tight black skirt and a green satin blouse that strained across her breasts. Ruffles ran around the neck of the low-cut blouse matching the frills at her elbows. Her black high heels were sinking into the gravel. Californian Poppy, Vera's trademark perfume, wafted towards Daisy.

'Why you don't live in one bleedin' place together beats me. I've said it before and I'll say it again. All this to-ing and fro-ing. Or

you could buy a house half way between London and Gosport. It ain't as though that Roy Kemp is short of a penny or two, is it?' Daisy had been cross. She'd heard it all before, and she wanted to get away, to see Roy.

'How many more times am I going to have to tell you he's still married to my mate, Moira? Besides, I like Gosport.' Daisy was looking around for her son, little Eddie. She wanted to hug him goodbye, take the memory of his little boy smell with her to London. She worried sometimes that he was too quiet, too shy for his age. But he wasn't yet two and a half and there was plenty of time for him to become a chatterbox. Daisy thought about his father, he'd been the silent type an' all.

'Humphh!' snorted Vera. 'That Moira still in the loony bin?'

Vera could be very outspoken at times. Sometimes she tried Daisy's patience. 'You know it's a sanatorium in Spain, not a loony bin. An' you also know I want to get going. Don't keep on. Where's my boy?' Daisy looked round the vast front garden.

Little Eddie was the son of Eddie Lane, a local toe-rag who'd got mixed up with the London mob and had been killed. He was the first great love of her life. Her child was her second. Little Eddie was a carbon copy in looks of his father and Vera was staying at Daisy's house for the weekend so she could take care of him and be company for Susie. Vera adored little Eddie and spoiled him. Not that Susie and Si, the young couple Daisy had befriended from her cafe days, didn't give in to him too.

Susie and Si had come to live with Daisy after their little girl had been killed in a road accident. And Daisy didn't want them to leave. Susie seemed to have happily taken over the role of chief cook and bottlewasher. Her husband, Si, was manager of The World's Stores, a grocery shop in Gosport's High Street.

Daisy cherished the closeness when Vera came to stay. There was plenty of room in the house and it reminded her of the days when she, Vera and Susie had lived and worked together in Bert's Cafe in the heart of Gosport.

Vera persisted. 'I still think Roy and you should live together instead of him trundling down 'ere to Gosport or you driving up to London . . .'

Daisy slammed the boot shut and turned the chrome handle.

'He has his business up there an' I won't leave you cranky lot down here. You can set a clock by the regularity of our meetings an' that's the way we like it! Though why I don't wring your scrawny neck an' be free of you an' your nagging, I don't know!'

Daisy looked around her garden at the daffodils in full bloom.

'All this yellow after the dark days of winter is lovely, Vera. We made a good job of planting and weeding, didn't we? I'm going to get loads more bulbs off Alfie, the garden bloke down the market, about September time and plant 'em out the back garden as well. Don't you think the weather is warming up nicely?'

'Eddie!' Obviously Vera wasn't going to answer her but her voice cut through the Friday morning air like one of the ships sounding a fog horn down in Portsmouth Harbour.

'Jesus Christ, our Vera! That poor kid'll 'ave burst ear drums you keep doing that!'

'You wanted to say goodbye to 'im, didn't you?'

A front window opened and a tousled blonde head appeared. Susie put her fingers to her lips.

'He's crawled in with me and gone back to sleep. You don't want to wake 'im.' She blew Daisy a kiss and without further ado, closed the lead-paned window.

'I guess that's told me.' Daisy put her arms around Vera's small frame and hugged her tightly. 'Give 'im a kiss for me and take one for yourself.'

'Piss off!'

Daisy laughed and opened the car door. A fat tabby cat had waddled down the driveway and Vera spoke lovingly to it before picking it up.

'My Kibbles 'as come to wave you off, Dais.' She lifted the cat's paw and made a waving motion.

'You're a daft tart, Vera.' She slid inside on to the cool black leather seat. 'See you Monday morning.'

But she hadn't seen any of them since.

How could she have let herself be taken in so easily that morning?

She'd left the safety of her own driveway and driven past leafy Stanley Park and along the Browndown Road into Lee on the Solent. Trees were in blossom and the grass was emerald green.

There wasn't a cloud in the sky and it promised to stay that way. She'd turned right just past Lee Tower, white and majestic against the greeny blue of the sea, past the few shops and into the quiet road that led through farmland until it reached Newgate Lane. The golf course was to the right of her with white-blossomed bushes lining the lane. She always took this route to the main road when she went to stay with Roy every fortnight.

Daisy liked to see and breathe the waters of the Solent with the Isle of Wight backdrop. She enjoyed the ships, the yachts and the ever-changing colour of the sea, sometimes muddy grey, sometimes brilliant blue, before she reached the Tower Ballroom at Lee on the Solent and turned off.

She'd braked in alarm when, rounding a corner, she'd spotted a car with its driver's door open and what appeared to be the body of a woman on the grass verge. Her heart had been beating fast as she'd got out of her car and approached the still form.

She knew it could be ages before anyone came down this rarely used road, so the poor woman could lie there hurt or worse for a long time. As she neared the body she saw it wasn't a person at all, merely bundles of rags and clothing placed there to look like one. The car was empty.

Who would do this, she'd wondered?

She didn't have to wonder for long before she was grabbed from behind and something was dropped over her head. She knew she was being thrust into the nearby car. Not her own car, she could smell and feel the difference of the car's interior.

She'd screamed and kicked out at her attacker but her wrists were already pinioned together behind her. She could smell peppermints, cologne, and feel the roughness of the man's clothes as he held her tight. And there was something familiar about him.

A sharp prick piercing her thigh was followed by a swift feeling of lightheadedness, then a sweet sensation that sent her floating into a rainbow-coloured world where nothing mattered.

And when she awoke she was in this room.

She'd raised her left hand to look at the familiar gold bangle that Eddie had bought her. It had gone. She mourned its loss as painfully as she'd mourned his death until, still drugged, she'd slept again.

Daisy glanced at the mug of tea Glo had brought, picked it up with shaking hands and sipped at it until the tepid brown liquid was gone. Then she put the mug on the lino, turned her face into the mattress and closed her eyes.