Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

The Ice Cream Girls

Written by Dorothy Koomson

Published by Sphere

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

the ice cream girls

DOROTHY KOOMSON

sphere

serena

AS COLD AS ICE CREAM?

Serena Gorringe, one half of the so-called Ice Cream Girls duo accused of killing popular teacher Marcus Halnsley, is expected to take the witness stand today in her murder trial.

Gorringe, 19, is the older of the two and is widely thought to have been the driving force behind the pair's cold-blooded plot to seduce, torture and murder her former History teacher.

Although Gorringe and her accomplice, Poppy Carlisle, went to the police after the murder claiming there had been an accident in which Halnsley was stabbed, evidence at the scene suggested he had been subjected to torture before he later died from a stab wound to the heart.

Both Gorringe, pictured eating ice cream and wearing a string bikini, right, and Carlisle deny torture and murder. They also both deny being the assailant who ultimately delivered the fatal blow to Mr Halnsley.

Daily News Chronicle, October 1989

serena

'Serena Gorringe, I love you.'

Oh my God! It's going to happen. It's really going to happen. After nearly 15 years of wanting this, hoping for this, *praying* for this, it's going to happen. He's going to propose.

Or, maybe he isn't. Maybe I'm having one of my 'moments' where I've so completely immersed myself in a fantasy, it seems real.

I glance around, searching for proof in my surroundings that I'm not making it all up. We're at a table for two outside our favourite Brighton restaurant – a small, family-run Mexican cantina that sits on the edge of the beach. It's a clear, warm night and the sky is teeming with stars. The rhythmic ssshushing of the dark sea mingles gently with the loud music spilling from inside the restaurant, while the smell of spicy food fuses deliciously with the salt air. To my left Brighton pier is adorned with hundreds upon hundreds of lights, and to my right Worthing pier's lights seem more demure than its more famous cousin's but are still pretty. This is such a perfect setting for a proposal, it can't possibly be real, I *must* be dreaming.

I focus on Evan again. He is down on bended knee, staring at me with a serious expression on his face. This is no fantasy. It can't be. Because in all my imaginings, Evan has never been prostrate in front of me – it's so far removed from his normal behaviour, I've never been able to conjure up what he would

look like doing it. Big gestures with him are so few and far between that this one is like seeing a unicorn walking down Brighton seafront – I could only believe it if I saw it. So this must be real, because I am seeing it.

'Serena Gorringe, I love you,' he repeats, and I know this is definitely real. Only the real-life Evan would know that I would have flitted off into one of my 'crazy worlds' as he calls them, as soon as he got down on one knee and started speaking. Only the real-life Evan would know that I'd need to go into one of my crazy worlds to double-check this was actually happening. And only the real-life Evan would know that when I returned to this reality, he would have to continue by starting again.

'I want to spend the rest of my life with you.' He reaches out and takes my left hand in both of his large hands, holds on to me tenderly but securely. 'I don't normally say things like this, so when I tell you that you've made my life so much more than it would have been and I never want our time together to end, you know I mean it. So, would you do me the honour of marrying me?'

'We're already married,' I reply.

My husband's face softens from his serious expression into a huge, warming smile. 'Again,' he says. 'Will you marry me, again?'

I slide slowly and gently into silence to savour this. This *proposal*. I was robbed of this last time around. And this finally proves he wants to be with me for ever. Yes, he's already committed to it by marrying me, but he actually *wants* to do it. Last time it was all rather ambiguous and necessary when we decided to do it.

May, 1996

We lay fully clothed, side by side on the bed in his small London flat, staring at the ceiling. I'd just told him that the morning-after pill I'd taken after the condom split hadn't worked and I

was pregnant. A missed period and three tests had told me so. (I'd waited until we were horizontal to break the news because I suspected he'd fall over.) 'Oh, OK,' he said, before sighing a deep, slightly mournful sigh of resignation and defeat. I sighed, too, knowing what he meant, how he felt. It wasn't terrible news, it wasn't even bad news, it was just life-changingly unexpected. I wasn't ready, I was sure he wasn't either. But here we were, ready or not. A baby was on its way.

'We should probably get married,' I stated.

'To stop our parents freaking out,' he replied.

'Because they would,' I said.

'Freak out. Yeah.'

'Yeah.'

Evan didn't realise that when I said 'should probably', I meant 'have to'. If it was just about me, I wouldn't have cared, I wouldn't have minded not getting married. But after what had happened to our family a few years earlier, what I had put my parents through, I could not do this to them as well – I could not add 'unmarried mother' to my list of crimes . . . I had to show them that I wasn't who the world thought I was, I was a respectable girl and I could do things the right way. I *had* to get married.

'It's not as if we weren't going to get married at some point, anyway,' Evan said, trying to rally, trying to rescue the situation by sounding positive. 'We might as well do it now.'

'Yeah, I suppose,' I replied. And six weeks later we were married and that was that. No romance, no story to tell and retell, there wasn't even an engagement ring to show off.

Ever since then, I've had a niggling doubt about where we would be if we hadn't been married at the wrong end of a shotgun. Without doubt, if he knew Serena Gorringe at the end of the eighties, if he knew the person who was all over the papers and who had been accused of something terrible, he would not have married me. But he did not know her. He met and got to know the real me. And I've always wondered if the

real me was good enough. If the real me was the person he *wanted* to marry, instead of *had* to marry simply to satisfy ultra-traditional parents.

'Last time, we didn't get the chance to do it properly,' Evan says. 'I want that for us this time. I promised myself on the day we did that we'd do it again properly. Since our first wedding, I've been putting money aside so we could do it. Big church, white dress, huge party, honeymoon – the lot. We can have everything that we couldn't afford or didn't have time to do before, including . . .' He reaches into the inside pocket of his favourite suit jacket and pulls out a small, blue velvet box. He opens it up to show me and there, languishing on a silk bed, is a large, many-faceted, square-cut diamond on a silver band.

The air catches in my throat.

'An engagement ring. This time, an engagement ring as well as a real proposal.'

'Is that a real diamond?' I can barely form the words to speak in its presence let alone think about touching it.

'Of course. We can afford it now. And it's on a platinum band, from the same place where we got our wedding rings.'

My hands fly up to my face as tears fill my eyes and swell in my throat. He's thought about it, he's planned it and has done it all because I am good enough: he does want to be with me. He does want to be married to me, just as much as I want to be married to him.

I've never wanted to be with someone as much as I want to be with Evan. '*What about you-know-who?'* whispers my conscience. It is the part of my conscience that lives in the past; it worships the past, clings to it, is always determined to drag the past into the present. '*Wasn't you-know-who the love of your life?*'

My conscience is wrong, of course. Evan is The One. He's the only one.

'Are you sure, Serena?' mocks my conscience. *'Are you absolutely sure about that?'*

I'm sure, I'm one hundred per cent sure. There really is no

one but my husband for me. What I had with *you-know-who* wasn't love, it wasn't like what I have with Evan. It wasn't even the same creature, how could it have been?

'Babe?' Evan says, in a way that suggests he has called me a few times.

'Sorry,' I say, 'miles away.' *Another life away.*

'I'm getting a cold knee and a little nervous,' he says.

'Nervous? Why?'

'You haven't actually said yes.'

'Haven't I?' I ask.

'No, you haven't.'

'Oh.'

He grins that grin of his. 'Do you want me to ask you again?'

I nod eagerly. Just one more time, especially now I know there's a ring involved.

'OK,' he says with a slight, mock-exasperated shake of his head. 'Serena Gorringe . . .' He pauses to slip the ring halfway up my finger, and I hold my breath, trying to remember every detail because I will recreate it for the kids, for my sisters, for my parents, for anyone who cares to listen. 'Will you make me the happiest man on earth by marrying me and becoming Mrs Gillmare all over again?' He pushes the ring into place beside my wedding band.

I almost forget to breathe as I examine the two rings. They slot together almost seamlessly, and they look like they were made for each other. Like nothing will ever tear them apart.

'Of course I will,' I say and leap up as he struggles to his feet. 'Of course I'll marry you again.' I throw my arms around his neck and he grins at me before he scoops me into his arms and then dips me backwards for a deep, show-stopping, movie-style kiss. Another unicorn-on-Brighton-seafront-type gesture. He is full of them tonight.

I immerse myself in it all. In the kiss, the proposal, the man. I'm only vaguely aware that we've had an audience and now the air around us is full of the sound of people clapping.

I'm going to hang on to this moment. I have to. I know how easily everything can be taken away. Everything is fragile, when you're like me. Very few things are permanent. I live on a precipice of falling into my past, of people finding out what I have been accused of, how I was publicly branded, and being judged all over again on that. I live with the constant fear that someone or something is going to tip me over the edge.

But not tonight, eh? Not right now. Right now, I am the woman who Dr Evan Gillmare wants to spend the rest of his life with.

Right now, I am the happiest woman on earth and nothing bad could possibly happen to me.

serena

I'm walking around my kitchen, opening cupboards and appliances, looking for the knives.

The dinner knives are safe but the sharp ones, the ones that can do serious damage, seem to be missing in action. Admittedly, that's my fault: I hid them last night, and I can't quite remember where. It wouldn't be a problem if the house wasn't minutes away from becoming a chaos of breakfast and day-organising and the usual family pandemonium. It wouldn't even be a problem if Evan hadn't made me promise not to do this again.

My fingers reach for the oven door for a third time and I yank it open really quickly, hoping that the knives will have materialised in there, the original hiding place, the favourite hiding place.

Every night, before bed, I used to collect all the sharp knives and put them on a baking tray and put them in the oven – just in case someone broke in while we were asleep and decided to use our own cutlery against us. Then I started doing it before we settled down to watch TV in the evening, in case someone broke in the back door while we were lounging in the front room. And then it was just after washing up because it was easier. After a while, I realised that hiding the knives in the same place every night, night after night, might not be a good idea if we were being watched, so I started hiding them in all

sorts of ingenious places, places that a burglar with ill intentions would never think to look. Turns out, I wouldn't think to look there either because I'm constantly doing this: looking for the knives.

Evan, Verity and Conrad used to be very nice about it, accepted it as one of my little quirks, even though they had to hack away at cheese and tear bread some days because Mum couldn't find the knives. Then, Evan discovered them in his gym bag – at the gym – and had a total understanding melt-down. He came storming through the kitchen door, and started shouting at me in front of the kids. *'I could have been arrested for carrying multiple dangerous weapons, Sez!'* he'd screamed. '*And what do I tell them, I've got a crazy wife who hides the knives and then forgets where she's put them*?' I'd been so tempted to say, 'Yes, because that's the truth', but decided not to push it. I had to leave him alone for his temper to subside and then tell him I was sorry. After that, he made me promise that if I insisted on hiding the knives, I'd write down where they were so it wouldn't happen again.

Obviously I'd crossed my fingers behind my back when I agreed because, *come on*, that would defeat the whole point, wouldn't it? I've been pretty good since then at remembering. But after last night, and the champagne and the celebration at home, my head is fuzzy, my senses are blunted and I can't remember much, least of all where I stashed the sharp stuff. Could've sworn it was the oven, would have put money on it.

I snatch the stainless-steel door open, for a fourth time, just in case. No. Nada. Nothing. *Damn it!*

Something being shoved loudly through the letterbox makes me jump. *'Shhh*,' I hiss at the door as I leap over the creaky floorboards, mapped out like uncracked paving stones in my mind, to collect the morning paper. '*Do you want to get me in trouble?*' I suspect Evan will take back the proposal, change his mind about wanting to marry me again, if he finds

out that I can't locate the knives again. It's one of my many little foibles that niggle him.

November, 1990

At five minutes past 11 a.m. on the seventh of November, a tall, muscular man with a shaved back-and-sides Afro threw a pint of orange juice in my face.

I had been curled up, as usual on non-lecture days, in the big squashy armchair at the back of the college bar, beside the floor-to-ceiling windows that looked out over the college playing fields. I would sit in there, comforted by the smell of stale smoke, spilt alcohol and musty carpet, and read.

Until that moment, I thought I was safe, I thought no one knew where I was or who I was. I thought my shame had been buried and I could cautiously, carefully, start again, two hundred miles from the scene of my alleged crime.

But the splash of liquid on my face, hair and books told me otherwise. Told me to run before things got worse. People had spat at me in the street before, had written me hate mail, had crossed the road to avoid me, had threatened me with violence . . . and now it was starting up again. I leapt out of the chair and grabbed my belongings – my textbooks, room keys and purse – spread like a pack of splayed cards on the table, and ran. Not before I said, 'Sorry. Thank you. I'm sorry.' Not before I let him know that I wasn't enjoying myself, I hadn't forgotten, I hadn't really left it all behind.

'Wait!' I heard him call as I crossed the threshold. But I did not wait. I did not want to make it easy for him to finish off what he started.

Down the corridor, around the corner, out into the wide, paved courtyard, I ran. 'Please! Miss! Wait!' he called again but I sprinted on, heading for the safety of my room. I could hear his footsteps behind me, gaining on me, and I pushed myself harder, desperate to get to my room, desperate to shut and lock

the door, to climb into bed and hide under the covers until he got bored and left me alone.

At the door to my halls, I worked as fast as I could to type in the five-digit code but as I hit the last number, his hand came down on my forearm, stopping me from turning the handle.

I tried to scream, but it was swollen and bloated from my run and stuck in my throat; then became firmly lodged into place by the fear of what was about to come.

'My God you can run,' he said, his chest heaving. 'Are you OK?' He pointed over his shoulder. 'I'm so sorry about back there.' He paused to catch his breath a little more. 'Whoa! Mad run! I thought . . . I'm sorry. I was coming over to see if you wanted a drink. I think of you as my reading partner because I always see you in there reading like I do. Thought I'd make contact. Turned into the wrong kind of contact, if you know what I mean.'

'You didn't do it on purpose?' I replied.

'Why would I do it on purpose?' he asked. 'What sort of sick person would do that on purpose?'

'You don't know who I am?' I searched his face for an answer that might be different from the one coming out of his mouth.

'Should I?' he asked with raised eyebrows.

'You don't know who I am,' I stated. I relaxed into that sentence, enjoying exactly what it meant: safety, anonymity.

'Tell me who you are, then, if I should know.'

'I'm nobody,' I said.

'Ri-ght,' he said carefully. 'So, are we cool? You're OK?'

I nodded at him. 'I'm OK.'

'Good. I can go back to my reading and not worry that I've traumatised you, yeah?'

I nodded again. 'Yeah.'

'Good. That's good.' He took a couple of steps away then said, 'What's your name?'

'Oh, um, well . . . um . . .'

'You don't know your own name?'

'I was just trying to work out if I should tell you my real name.'

'Fair enough.'

'It's Serena.'

'OK, Serena, I'll see you then.'

'Yeah, I'll see you.'

He'd walked a little distance away when he called over his shoulder: 'Oh, by the way, I'm Evan.'

'Bye, Evan,' I called. Under my breath I added, 'And thank you. Thank you so, so much.'

I tug the paper out of the door, knowing I should be grateful that the paperboy managed to get it *into* the door this time, mostly he stands at the gate and chucks it in the general direction of the door.

I go back to the kitchen, flicking through the paper even though Evan hates it when I do that. He likes to come to it afresh, without the pages mussed up by my fingers. On some level, that's probably why I do it: he tells me not to do something – asks, really – *asks* me not to do something and my brain tells me it wants to do nothing else but that thing. I can't help it. It's the same reason I've never been any good at diets – tell me I can't have a food and I want nothing but that food.

I'm halfway through the paper, flicking through the pages, when my eyes are dragged to the headline of the small pictureless square at the bottom of page five: SWEET TASTE OF FREEDOM FOR THE ICE CREAM GIRL. I lift the paper closer to my nose to be sure, to double-check I am really reading those words.

I stop in my tracks as ice-cold fingers with razorblade fingernails begin clawing at my heart, lungs and stomach. This is what it feels like when the past crops up unawares, when it will not stay dead and buried as it should be.

I read the words that go with the headline, and the tearing

and ripping at my insides intensifies. This is what a heart attack feels like: what happens when your heart is overwhelmed by the secrets it carries and wants to let them out, hurting you in the process.

I read those words again and again and again. Life is all about scales, checks and balances, I sometimes think: every time something good happens, something awful will come along to even it out, to stop me being completely and blithely happy. I finally got my yearned-for proposal, so now she is back to haunt me.

Creak! of the top step sounds through the house, signalling the imminent arrival of someone I love and who does not know.

I can't be caught reading this. Even though there's no picture, there are two words that connect me to this, that would give me away and would unleash hell upon our small, ordinary lives.

I scrunch the paper in my hands and then run to the bin, hit the pedal and shove it in, down where it will not do any damage, down, down out of sight. I'll have to tell Evan the paperboy didn't deliver it or something; I'll have to go back on my promise to never lie – not to others, not to myself. But if it's a choice between a small white lie or the end of everything, I *have* to lie. Show me a person who wouldn't and I'll show you someone who has never lived through hell.

The weight of the tread of the footsteps tells me it's Evan. I pick up the stainless steel kettle, dash to the sink, and manage to turn on the tap before he wanders into the kitchen.

'Morning, wife-to-be-again,' he says. I'm sure he's smiling but I cannot turn to check, I cannot face him until I have composed myself, rearranged my expression so he can't tell something is wrong.

'Morning, you,' I say, bright and breezy. There is an extra forced note of happiness in my voice, but if he notices, he doesn't mention it. 'Ready for another day at the coalface?'

He sucks in his breath. 'Ooooh, not quite. Coffee, toast,

smoothie. Then I might consider it.' I hear him rub the slight paunch that appears whenever he sits down or slouches. 'Actually, I could murder cheese on toast.'

Murder. The word echoes and pulsates in my mind and in the deepest recesses of my chest. *Murder, murder, murder.*

'Really thin slices of cheese. Dash of Worcester sauce.'

'You know where toaster is,' I say, playing for time. Knives. Where are the knives? *Where?*

'Sez?'

'Yes?' I reply.

'Look at me, please.'

I take an extra deep breath and turn to face my husband. He is a year older than me, on his way to forty, but with very few wrinkles to show for it, because, I often tell him, he's lived an easy life. His eyes are fringed by long black eyelashes, while his mouth is almost always ready with a smile. He has smooth, dark brown skin and has been through more hairstyles than me until settling on a close-cut shave all over. Once, Conrad convinced him to get an 'E' shaved into the back of his head. Our son, seven at the time, had thought it pretty cool, while I'd been amazed he'd done it. He was actually going to keep it until I reminded him that most people don't expect their GPs to be walking adverts for dance drugs. The pair of them had looked at me as if I had named the drug ecstasy just to stop Evan being really cool and 'down with the kids'.

'Yes, how can I help you?' I ask him.

'Where are the knives?'

'Pardon?'

'I need to make cheese on toast; where are the knives?'

'They're um . . .' I stop speaking in the hope something else will take over and speak for me, that God will send an angel to put the right words in my mouth.

'You don't know, do you?' he says, as he observes me. I imagine that several patients who have tried to pull a fast one have wilted under the pressure of that look.

I sigh. Tut. Shake my head. All the while praying that something will come to me. Or something will happen to rescue me. 'They're . . .'

Creak! at the top of the stairs interrupts me.

'Oh, is that the kids?' I say happily.

Evan's right eyebrow rises at me. 'Saved by the creak, huh?' he says.

Con wanders into the kitchen, rubbing one eye and tugging at the bottom of his red and blue pyjama top. My eight-year-old is usually a bundle of energy, constantly needing reminding to slow down. To look at him now, you'd be forgiven for thinking he spends most of his time asleep or slumped in front of the goggle box.

'Vee woke me up,' he complains as he rests his head on my stomach. 'She's singing. She's always singing, Mum. Make her stop.'

'I'll try, sweetie,' I say, running my hand over the smooth bristles of his shaved hair. It's good to hold him, to be able to anchor myself in the present with him. He is real. He is here. The soft shapes of him – his slender limbs and lean body – tell me this is my life, this is who I am. I am here, everything else is not.

'Your mother was just about to tell me where the knives are,' Evan informs our son.

Con lifts his head and rests his chin on my solar plexus so he can gaze up at me with eyes that are almost identical to Evan's. When he was a baby, people used to comment on the size of his eyes and the length of his lashes wherever we went. They are beautiful and large and open. Honest. 'Did you lose them again, Mum? Is Dad going to shout at you?'

'Noooo, Dad's not going to shout at me because I didn't lose them,' I say with a defiant look at my husband.

'So, where are they?' Evan counters.

'They're . . .'

Another creak sounds at the top of the stairs, this time followed by the skipping sounds of Verity coming to join us.

She has been unusually chipper these days. Skipping, singing, cheerily doing her kitchen chores – even offering to help Con with his. I suspect there's a boy involved, which does not make me feel good. Or happy. I'm waiting for the right time to broach the matter with her because she is too young for boys. She's not allowed to wear make-up, to stay out late, to go away with her friends, to have an email address that we don't have access to, to have a mobile phone number she can give to friends. But still, somehow . . .

The three of us watch her coming through the kitchen doorway, tall and slender, hair pulled back into three connected ponytails that go from her forehead to the nape of her neck, wearing her pink dressing gown tied-up and nothing on her feet.

'What?' She stops just over the threshold. 'What have I done now?' she asks, aggrieved. 'Nothing, that's what. So why are you all staring at me like I've done something?'

'You haven't done a thing, sweetheart,' Evan says. 'We were just marvelling at how your arrival has stopped your mother telling us where the knives are.'

Verity's large brown eyes swing dramatically to me. 'Oh, Mum, you *didn't*!'

'Didn't what?' I ask.

'Forget where you put the knives, *a–gain*!'

'No, I didn't.'

'So, where be they?' Evan asks.

'They're . . . They're . . .'

'OH MY GOD!' Verity suddenly screeches. 'WHAT IS *THAT*?!'

We are trying to recover from the first screech when she continues, 'ON YOUR FINGER, MUM! WHAT IS THAT?'

Verity's screeches are up in the realms of dog whistles, and really quite painful to someone who is tired, hungover and under a serious amount of pressure.

'Oh, my engagement ring. Do you like it?' I hold out my

hand for her to take a closer look. 'Your father asked me to marry him again last night and I said yes.'

'I was thinking we could do it on the twenty-fifth of June,' Evan says.

'Ah, so only one anniversary to remember? Yeah, good one,' I say to him. 'I'll still expect two cards and two presents, you cheapskate.'

'Wait, you're actually going to get married? With a ceremony and everything?' Verity asks.

'Of course,' Evan and I say at the same time.

'It's going to be huge,' Evan continues. 'Wedding dress, co-ordinated bridesmaids outfits, big cars . . . the lot.'

Verity rolls her eyes. 'Why can't you just be like other people's parents? They don't do this sort of thing.'

'Other people's parents clearly don't love each other as much as we do,' I explain, hoping she leaves it there, that she doesn't go over to the dark side of teenage stroppiness because she will be opening up a whole world of trouble for herself.

'You'll just show me up in front of everyone,' she says. 'Why can't this family just be normal for once?'

I feel Evan bristle a second or two after me.

'And that's the end of Verity Gillmare's performance of "Sulky Teen",' I say. 'We're going to get nice, polite Verity back now. And she's going to apologise for all the things she's just said.' I smile at my daughter. She knows that I've just stopped her from having her iPod taken away for a week, or having limited access to the computer. Evan has a zero-tolerance policy on backchat and rudeness, and I do not want the day to start with a battle between them. I just want this day to go back to being the lovely day after I was proposed to.

Verity stares down at her bare feet and starts to wriggle her toes as the atmosphere in the kitchen grows ever-thicker and more tense. Conrad has stopped breathing while his little heart is racing against my body. He's scared that if Verity is banned from television, has her computer taken away or is sent to bed as

soon as she comes home from school, it'll mean the same for him; he'll be a victim of the fallout she caused.

'Sorry,' she mumbles.

'What was that? Did the little mouse speak? I can't hear her if she did,' I joke. 'Come on little mouse, squeak up.'

Despite herself, she smiles a little as she looks up and says, 'Sorry Mum, sorry Dad.'

'Good girl,' I say. 'Now come on all of you, sit down. We need breakfast and then to get this show on the road.'

'Knives?' Evan asks.

'Living room magazine rack,' I say without thinking. That was the problem all along, of course – thinking too much.

Almost imperceptibly, Evan's mouth and left eyebrow twitch. He is thinking that Con could have found them, played with them, hurt himself.

'Before you say anything, the magazine rack is on top of the cupboard in the spare bedroom.'

'Of course,' he says and shakes his head in despair. 'Where else would they be? I'll go get them, shall I?'

'Right, so what do you want for breakfast?' I ask. 'Your dad will probably drop you off today on his way in.' I cannot leave the house to do my normal things for fear of someone seeing me and remembering. Those sorts of incidental news items in the paper are the things that jog people's minds; make them realise that you don't just 'have one of those faces', they really do remember you from somewhere. And that somewhere is somewhere you'd rather they forgot. 'And you can buy your lunches today, but no sugary or sweet stuff.'

'Mum, it's Saturday,' Conrad says.

Saturday? That's news to me. 'Oh,' I say.

'You did know that, didn't you?' Verity asks, her voice and attitude no longer surly, more incredulous and concerned.

'Course I did, just trying to keep you on your toes.' I give Con a quick squeeze. 'Come on, sweetheart, sit down at the table while I start breakfast. Dad's doing Saturday morning surgery.'

I turn back to the sink and try to calm myself. Forgetting the day of the week is normal after the heavy session of last night. Everyone knows I can't drink very much. So this . . . this memory lapse means nothing. It's not like before. That was then, this is now and this is nothing like then. All of us forget things every now and again.

All of us do it.