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...

Dirty Tricks

Written by Jo Carnegie

Published by Corgi Books

All text is copyright © of the author

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

DIRTY TRICKS

Jo Carnegie



CORGI BOOKS

TRANSWORLD PUBLISHERS
61–63 Uxbridge Road, London W5 5SA
A Random House Group Company
www.rbooks.co.uk

DIRTY TRICKS
A CORGI BOOK: 9780552160872

First publication in Great Britain
Corgi edition published 2011

Copyright © Jo Carnegie 2011

Jo Carnegie has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

This book is a work of fiction and, except in the case of historical fact, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Addresses for Random House Group Ltd companies outside the UK can be found at: www.randomhouse.co.uk
The Random House Group Ltd Reg. No. 954009

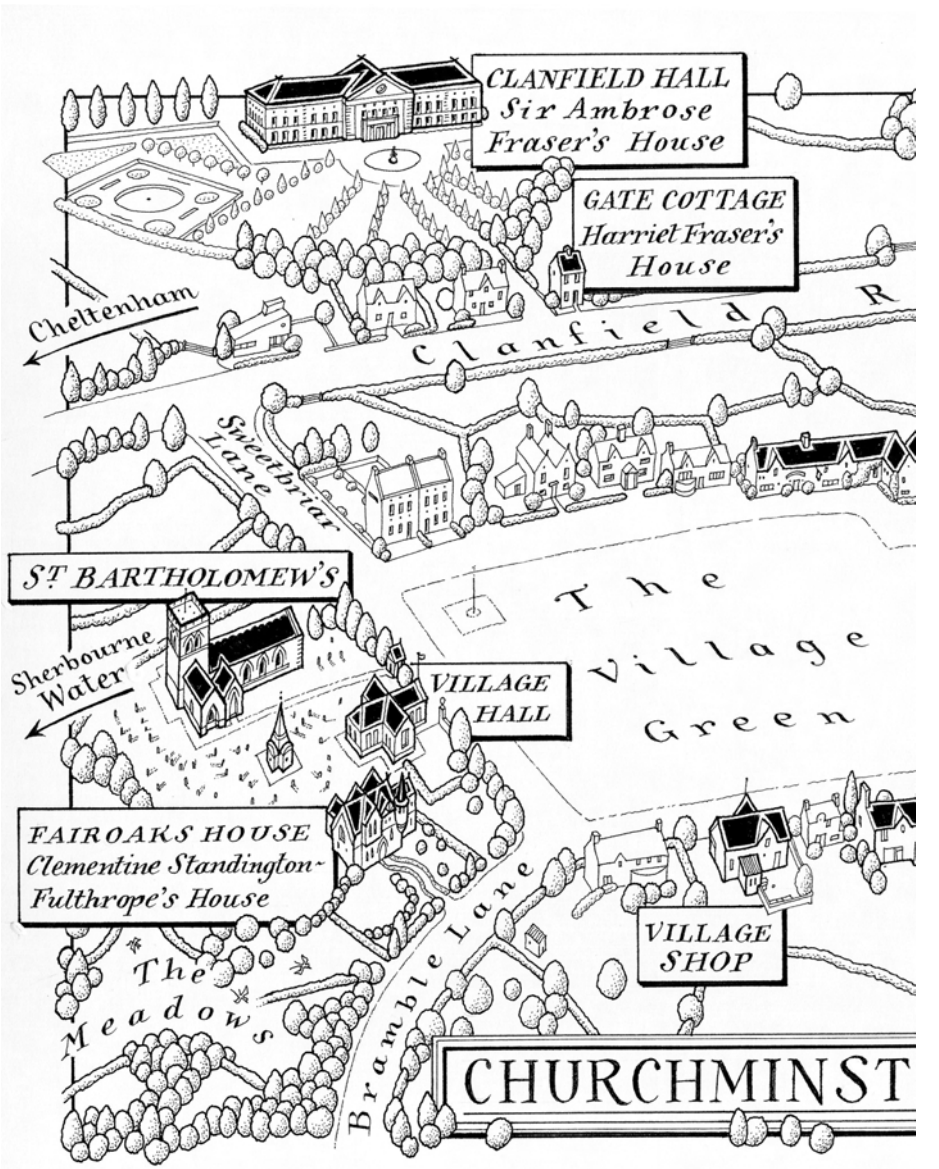
The Random House Group Limited supports The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the leading international forest certification organization. All our titles that are printed on Greenpeace approved FSC certified paper carry the FSC logo. Our paper procurement policy can be found at *www.rbooks.co.uk/environment*

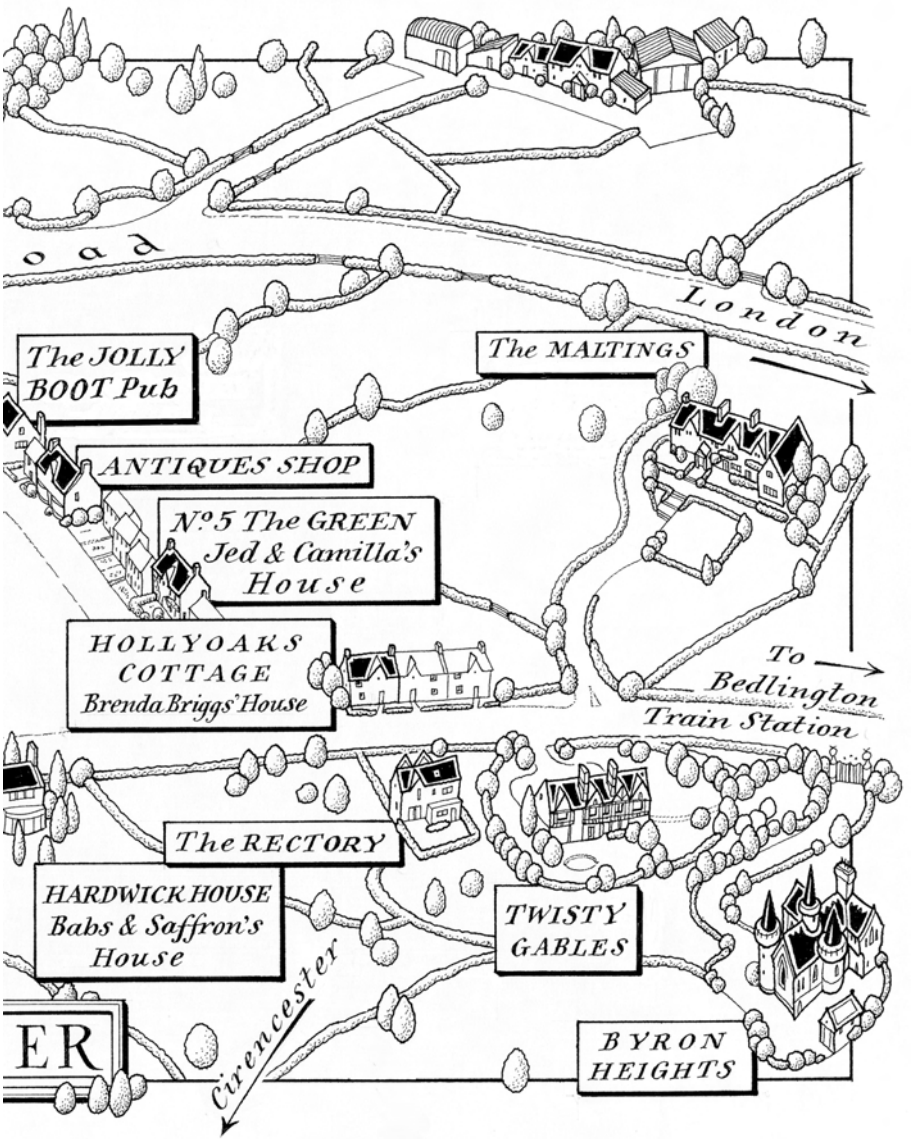
Typeset in 11/14pt Palatino by Falcon Oast Graphic Art Ltd.
Printed in the UK by CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham, SN14 6LH.

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1



To Joe, my soundboard


CLANFIELD HALL
Sir Ambrose
Fraser's House
GATE COTTAGE
Harriet Fraser's
House
Cheltenham
Clanfield R
Sweetbriar
Lane
ST BARTHOLOMEW'S
Sherbourne
Water
VILLAGE
HALL
The
Village
Green
FAIROAKS HOUSE
Clementine Standington-
Fulthrope's House
The
Meadows
Bramble Lane
VILLAGE
SHOP
CHURCHMINST


o a d
London
The JOLLY BOOT Pub
The MALTINGS
ANTIQUES SHOP
No. 5 The GREEN
Jed & Camilla's House
HOLLYOAKS COTTAGE
Brenda Briggs' House
To Bedlington Train Station
The RECTORY
HARDWICK HOUSE
Babs & Saffron's House
TWISTY GABLES
BYRON HEIGHTS
ER
Cirencester

JANUARY

Chapter 1

London

Click. She heard the front door close. Saffron lay back on the bed and waited.

'Saff?' The tread of his footsteps disappeared down the hall. 'Where are you?'

Saffron gave a little smile and adjusted the basque. Bloody thing was so tight she could hardly breathe. Still, no pain, no gain . . .

'I'm in here!'

The footsteps stopped. 'Saff?' There was a note of concern in his voice now. 'Are you OK?'

The bedroom door opened, to reveal the gorgeous sight of her boyfriend, Tom. 'Why are all the lights off . . . ?' He stopped dead. 'Oh.'

Saffron watched his eyes travel up and down her body, which was wearing nothing but Agent Provocateur's finest and her thigh-high, fuck-me boots. The candles placed round the room added a luminous sheen to her alabaster skin. Very slowly,

she lifted one long leg and crossed it over the other. 'Have fun?'

His eyes filled up with lust. 'Not as much as I'm about to.' He advanced towards her, pulling off his jacket, then his sweater, whilst unbuttoning his belt buckle. Ten seconds later he was standing in front of her, six foot of pure man. Judging by his erection, her boots were working.

'Come here, big boy.'

Tom climbed on the bed and held her, hands testing the lace and satin.

'Where did this come from? I only went out to get the papers.'

'Does there need to be a reason?'

He grinned, eyes hungry. 'You look incredible.'

As their gaze locked, Saffron felt the ascent into sexual abandon begin.

'I love you, babe.'

'I love you too,' he murmured, covering her face in little kisses. He started to pull at her basque. 'I want to touch you,' he said.

'Let me,' she said, hurriedly unhooking the garment and throwing it across the room. Almost immediately, Tom's mouth was on her pert breasts, her flat white belly. Licking, sucking, his tongue going everywhere . . .

'Keep the boots on. I need you to keep the boots on,' he instructed. Saffron wrapped her legs round his broad back. She could feel his fingers inside her, slipping in and out of the wetness, but Saffron needed more. Sod foreplay, she just wanted to *do* it.

'Fuck me now,' she gasped.

Tom didn't need telling a second time. He nudged her legs open and, as he slid inside her, Saffron gave that little involuntary gasp she always did. Tom was *hung*. She pushed her hips up to accommodate him even more, feeling him fill up every inch of her.

'I want to ride you,' she told him a few minutes later.

In one easy movement, Tom pulled her on top. Saffron looked down at his deep soulful eyes, and strong beautiful face covered with sweat. His hands slid round her hips, grabbing the soft flesh of her buttocks. As she slid up and down his cock Saffron felt the sensation mounting. 'Oh my God, I'm going to come.'

Underneath her, Tom's breathing had become intense and laboured. 'I've been wanting to for the last five minutes.'

Saffron was ready to let go. She felt the build-up in her groin, those wondrous few seconds before the main event, before it exploded through her body. Gripping with her knees, she arched her back, driving on to him, eking out every last second. An animalistic groan told her Tom had reached his orgasm at the same time. She flopped on to his chest, energy abruptly spent.

'I need to go to the gym more,' she gasped, feeling his heartbeat jump against hers. It was a full minute before Tom could speak.

'This is a very unholy way to spend a Sunday,' he said.

Saffron looked at him. 'It was a toss-up between this and the *Antiques Roadshow*,' she teased. Tom chuckled lazily, adorable dimples appearing in his

cheeks. Saffron felt her heart melt. *You are so perfect*, she thought, throwing her arms round his neck.

Half an hour later, they untangled themselves from each other. Saffron's boots lay discarded by the side of the bed, like deflated black bin liners.

'What have we got in the fridge?' she asked. Sex always left her starving. She got up and went to pull on Tom's stripy dressing gown. A quick look in the mirror on the wall revealed a tousled mess of short, white-blonde hair and a rash round her mouth from Tom's weekend stubble. Saffron pulled a face.

'Look at the state of me. Why can't I be one of those girls with long, silky hair that fans out over the pillow?'

Tom put his hands behind his head, showcasing perfect biceps. 'Oh, I don't know. I think the pixie-on-crack look is quite sexy.'

'You cheeky sod!' she laughed, leaping on him.

He gave a mock groan. 'I think you've broken a rib.'

'I'll break more than that in a minute, mate,' she said, snuggling up to him.

Saffron loved their Sundays together in Tom's little flat off the Portobello Road. They both worked in magazines, and weekdays could go past in a blur of deadlines and work things. Weekends were precious, just the two of them. If they could be bothered, they'd get up and go for brunch round the corner, then spend the rest of the afternoon browsing quirky galleries and antique shops. More often than not, they wouldn't step foot outside except for the newspapers,

just having lazy sex around the flat. Or fast, furious sex if they wanted it; despite his easy-going demeanour Tom was an animal in bed. Saffron had thought she had a high sex drive until she'd met him. She wasn't complaining, he was the best lover she'd ever had.

'So what do you fancy?' he asked her.

She shot him a saucy look. 'You.'

Tom raised an amused eyebrow. 'I mean, food.'

Saffron stretched out under the duvet. 'I think most things in the fridge have seen better days.'

'Do you want to go out?' he asked.

She pulled a face. 'That would involve showering and dressing, I don't think I can be arsed.' She reached up and pulled the blind aside to look out the window. 'Anyway, it's minging out there. Let's get a takeaway.'

'My kind of thinking.' He stroked her arm. 'What's it going to be? Thai, Chinese, pizza?'

'I could murder a massaman.'

'That's a bit exteme.'

Saffron smiled. 'Stupid.'

Tom sat up. 'You know I never pass up curry. I think I've got a menu for that new place off Ladbroke Grove.'

'Sounds great.'

He got out of bed and walked across the room. As he picked up a leaflet on the chest of drawers, she propped herself up on her elbow to watch. She never got tired of looking at his body. Tom Fellows had high, sculpted buttocks and long muscled legs, and his stomach was free from the late-twenties spread

catching up with most other blokes his age. Tom was a total hottie, but the best thing of all? He didn't even realize. It was one of the many things Saffron loved about her boyfriend. He turned and caught her looking. 'What?'

'Just checking your butt out.'

He shook his head, smiling. 'You want me to go and order?'

'Yes, please. Don't forget coconut rice. Oh, and can you get me some Tom Yum soup as well? And a bag of prawn crackers.'

'I've never met anyone who eats as much as you. Where does it all go?'

Saffron lifted the duvet to look at her flat stomach. 'One day I'll wake up as fat as a house. Will you still love me then?'

'Course I will, beautiful. Besides, I'll probably have a paunch and comb-over.'

Saffron looked at his thick dark hair. 'As if!'

'You never know.'

'I'd still love you if you were a baldie.'

Tom grinned and pulled on the Abercrombie & Fitch tracksuit bottoms Saffron had got him for Christmas. Fit. 'I'll go and call them. Do you want anything else in the meantime?'

'Cup of tea would be wonderful.'

He shot her a humorous look. 'What did your last slave die of?'

'Sex!' Saffron shouted after him, as he left the room. Smiling, she nuzzled back into the warmth of the bed. God, she was being a lazy bitch today. It was great. Her eyes travelled round the room. Tom's taste in

decor pretty much matched his personality; laid back and modest. The walls were painted white, there was slightly shabby looking stripped-wood flooring, and the only splash of colour came from his beloved pop art originals on the walls. Aside from Saffron, they were the only things Tom ever really spent money on.

The flat still had the bare, spartan whiff of a bachelor pad, even though they'd been going out for nearly two years. In the beginning Saffron had vowed to put feminine touches round the place: fresh flowers from the market, scented candles. But when they were together, everything else had faded into insignificance. They'd spent hours talking and laughing, in the bath or on the sofa, watching back-to-back box sets of *True Blood* and *Mad Men*. The only thing they could agree on. Saffron thought of that very cosy sofa in the living room, the neat line of Tom's size 13 trainers by the front door. From nowhere, she felt a lump in her throat. She was going to miss it – and him – so much.

Her phone went off, making her jump. Saffron reached down and picked it up from the floor by the bed. When she saw who it was, she felt a mixture of pleasure and irritation. She answered it.

'Hi, Babs. I mean, Mum.'

It was still weird using the term 'mum' after so long.

'Darling!' The wavery voice gushed down the line. 'How are you? How's Tom?'

'We're both fine, thanks.'

'What are you two lovebirds up to? Gambolling like a pair of spring lambs in Hyde Park? Kissing the winter cold away on London Bridge?'

'Mum, have you been at the gin again?'

'Just a little Sunday sharpener! It frees my creative juices, you know.'

Saffron rolled her eyes. Babs Sax made her living as an artist, and from what Saffron had seen of her mother's art, it certainly looked as if it had been painted by someone several sheets to the wind. To say it was bizarre and surreal was an understatement.

'Anyway, I just phoned to see if you wanted me to get you anything special in.'

She stared at the ceiling. Babs was *really* going overboard with the doting mum thing. It was the sixth time she'd called this weekend.

'Nah, don't worry about it.'

'No little treats? How about some Jammy Dodgers? They're your favourite.'

'I went off them when I was twelve.' *If you'd been around then you'd have known that.*

Her mother gave an embarrassed laugh. 'Of course! How silly of me.'

Saffron suddenly felt guilty. She knew her mum was trying. 'Actually, Jammy Dodgers sound good.'

'I've got your bedroom all ready, and I've even given my latest painting pride of place over your bed!' Saffron winced; it was bound to give her nightmares. Just then there was a loud crash. 'What's that?' her mother said in alarm.

Saffron called towards the door. 'Everything OK?'

Tom's voice came back down the corridor. 'Dropped a plate. Sorry.' Lovely as he was, he seemed to break something in the kitchen on a regular basis.

'What was that noise?' her mother cried. 'Is someone trying to break in?'

'It's fine, Mum, no one's died. Tom just broke something. Look, I'd better go. We're about to eat.'

Her mother sounded a bit disappointed. 'Oh! Well at least we'll have all the time in the world to catch up when you're home. I am looking forward to it, you know! We'll have such fun, us two girls together.'

'Yay!' Saffron tried to sound chirpy. 'Well, I'll speak to you tomorrow or something? To sort everything out.'

'Wonderful! Bye, darling.'

'Bye, Mum.'

'Goodbye, darling!'

'Bye, Mum,' Saffron said pointedly. Her mother had got into this annoying habit of refusing to put the phone down first. It meant Saffron always cut her off in the end, and subsequently left every phone call they had feeling bad.

'Bye, bye!'

'Mum!' she said in exasperation. 'Will you just put the bloody phone down!'

'Of course, goodbye then!' There was a silence at the other end. Saffron could hear her mother breathing, waiting. She clenched her fists.

'Oh, for God's sake. GOODBYE!' she said and ended the call. She flopped back on the bed. 'Aarrgh!'

Tom came back in. 'What's wrong?'

Saffron sighed. 'Why is it even thirty seconds talking to my mum makes me feel pissed off? Then I feel guilty for acting like a stroppy teenager again!'

Tom gave a wry smile. ‘Is this the same mother you are giving up your job to go and live in the country with?’

‘Oh, don’t!’ Saffron wailed. She looked at him, eyes wide with realization at what lay ahead. ‘Sweet baby Jesus, what have I done?’

Chapter 2

A few miles away in Chelsea, Saffron's friend Harriet Fraser was lying on her sofa watching a rerun of *Ugly Betty*. She'd meant to get up and go to the gym, but a few too many Chardonnays the night before had put paid to that. Instead Harriet had surfaced at 11 a.m., put her long coat over her pyjamas, and staggered to Tesco Metro for some comfort food. It was only when she'd got home and looked in the hallway mirror that she'd realized the remnants from last night's chilli kebab were still stuck to her chin. No wonder the cashier had looked at her oddly.

Harriet shuffled into the kitchen and dumped the bag on the work surface. A growing mountain of empty wine bottles was stacked by the bin, still waiting to be recycled. Harriet flushed guiltily; she really had to do something about it.

Her New Year's resolution to lose her booze belly wasn't going well. She peered into the fridge at the Waitrose luxury meals for one on the shelf, and the wilting bunch of vegetables in the cooler. As usual

they'd slowly rotted away, shrivelling along with her good intentions. She chucked the unopened packets of salad and cabbage in the bin, feeling even more ashamed. How could she be so wasteful?

The only thing that would make her feel half decent was a hot bath and her much-thumbed copy of *Emma*. Despite living in the bright lights of London, Harriet always felt happier in the cosy, chaste romantic world of books, where men were gentlemen, and relationships were lived out through balls in country-houses and stolen kisses in water meadows. She made her way down the fluffy carpeted hallway to the bathroom, the space dominated by the huge, gilt-framed hunting scenes her parents had insisted on giving her when she'd moved to the city.

As she turned on the bathroom light she winced at her reflection. With her sweet, soft face and huge brown eyes Harriet was a pretty, homely girl, her cheeks still rosy from the country air she had grown up in. Today, it had to be said, she wasn't looking her best. As well as still wearing last night's make-up and kebab, she had one dangly earring in. What on earth had she done with the other one? Sleep patterns tracked across her right cheek from where she'd passed out face first on her John Lewis embroidered cushion. *I'm thirty-five years old*, she thought despairingly. *Too old to be doing this*.

She looked at the line of expensive potions lining her bathroom counter. Eve Lom cleanser, Crème de la Mer moisturizer, the latest miracle serum. All courtesy of her job working at *Soirée* magazine, Britain's most famous glossy. In her job as PA and events coordinator,

Harriet was sent extravagant gifts on a daily basis. Not that they seemed to be helping at the moment. *I don't even know what half of them are supposed to be for*, she thought, as she picked up some exotically-named cream that promised to get rid of free radicals and enzymes.

An hour and a face mask later, Harriet was feeling marginally more human. Dressed in her fluffy dressing gown and slippers, she walked into the living room. It was gorgeous, with a Victorian fireplace, high ceilings and a bay window looking out on to the tree-lined street. Harriet had worked hard to make it cosy, giving it soft cream carpets and a squidgy three-piece suite from Laura Ashley. She flopped back down on the sofa and stared up at the ceiling. Flashes of the previous night kept coming back to her. She and her friend Cecily had been in a wine bar off Kensington High Street, and Harriet had a vague, unpleasant memory of chatting to a man with extremely large front teeth about the merits of Range Rovers versus all other 4×4s. As far as she could remember, his name had been Guy, he'd had terribly bad breath, and kept trying to shove his tongue down her throat at the bar. Harriet shuddered. She must stop spending all night in pointless conversations with men who weren't her type. It was no way to meet her future husband.

Harriet sighed. For some reason she was dreading work tomorrow. Normally she loved her job, co-ordinating the editor's diary, running the office and organizing all the *Soirée* parties, but lately she'd started feeling rather empty. Surely there was more to life than work and hangovers?

She wondered if she felt like this because her mother Frances, Lady Fraser of Clanfield Hall, Churchminster, had gone off to do volunteer work in Africa. Harriet still couldn't imagine her mother, an elegant Joanna Lumley lookalike, knee-deep in mud building sanitation blocks for orphans, but from what she'd heard, Lady Fraser was having the time of her life. 'Darling, I only wish I'd done it sooner! It's so good to push one's boundaries in life,' Frances had written on a battered postcard from somewhere in Kenya.

A loud trilling made her sit up. It took several moments before Harriet realized it was the noise of her landline. It was bound to be her father: no one but her parents used it, and her mother was thousands of miles away with no phone reception. Sir Ambrose had also been calling her practically every day since Lady Fraser had left, which was unheard of. Harriet suspected he was feeling rather lonely, not that he'd ever admit it.

'Hello, Daddy.'

'What's that?' her father barked impatiently down the phone. 'How did you know it was me?'

'Just a guess. Oh, that and caller ID.' Harriet settled herself back on the sofa. 'How are you?'

'I'm bloody bored, Harriet! What am I supposed to do when Frances has gone gallivanting off to some godforsaken country and left me?'

Harriet smiled. 'Come on, Daddy, you're just as proud of her as I am.'

'Harrumph!' her father said begrudgingly. 'Well, anyway. What's a man supposed to do round here?'

'You live in one of the most beautiful places in the

country!' Harriet pointed out, laughing. Clanfield Hall, the family seat, was a fifty-bedroom stately home that sat on the outskirts of a pretty Cotswolds village. 'There are lots of things to do.'

'Done them all. If I take one more walk round the trout lake I'll turn into a trout myself.' Her father paused. 'The last time I spoke to your mother she told me I should take up an evening class. An evening class! She says I need to "broaden my mind".'

Harriet thought her mum had a point. Her father's world did seem to consist of dogs, horse-racing and tramping the estate grounds with his shotgun. 'Maybe it would be a good idea,' she pointed out tactfully.

'What a load of old rubbish! It's the blasted evenings that get me, though, Harriet. Rattling around this place by oneself. I never thought I'd say this, but I miss the old girl giving me a flea in my ear.'

Harriet felt a pang of homesickness. She hated the thought of her father in the Hall by himself. Even if they did have their band of faithful staff, it wasn't the same thing. 'Why don't you have a cards evening and invite some of your friends over? I haven't heard you talk about Percival Drummond for ages.'

'That's because he's dead.' Her father, at nearly eighty, found that his circle of friends was starting to diminish by the year. Sir Ambrose himself, meanwhile, remained as combative as a terrier with a stick.

'Oh! I'm sorry, I didn't realize.'

'Don't be, old Percy was a dreadful bore. Bad loser as well.' Her father moved on to his favourite subject. 'Got yourself a chap yet?'

'Not since you asked me yesterday.'

Sir Ambrose gave another 'harrumph'. 'You're not getting any younger! Fine sturdy girl from good stock like you, I can't understand why you're not married. I suppose that's London for you.'

Harriet bit her lip. She felt guilty enough being his only child – and a girl at that. If her father couldn't have a handsome, crack-shot son and heir, then the least she could do was marry someone who was handsome and handy with a twelve-bore shotgun. Trouble was, there didn't seem to be that many of them around. It wasn't as if she hadn't been looking.

She changed the subject. 'Guess what? Saffron's coming to Churchminster next week! I'm sure she'll come and visit you at the Hall.'

'Who?'

'*Saffron*, Daddy. She came to stay with us for Christmas that time, remember? Remember – I told you, she's taking a break from work to write a novel, so she's moving back in with her mum, Babs Sax.'

By complete coincidence Saffron's mother lived in the pretty Cotswolds village Harriet had grown up in.

'What? Moving in with that madwoman? She must be off her trolley herself!' Sir Ambrose was being especially irascible today.

'Saffron needs somewhere peaceful to write her book,' Harriet said patiently.

Her father gave a guffaw of laughter. 'Since when has that bloody village been peaceful? From what your mother's told me there's a new scandal every week.' Sir Ambrose rarely went to Churchminster to mix with the locals.

Harriet smiled. 'Daddy, it's not that bad compared

to other places! Remember when Wootton-under-Edge had that mystery knicker pincher last year? No washing line was safe.'

'*Knicker pincher?* I've heard it all now. Mark my words. If Saffron's coming to Churchminster in search of peace and quiet, she's in for a nasty shock.'