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Love Always





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For Chris
I.W.O.

We can never go back, that much is certain. The past is still too close to us. The things we have tried to forget and put behind us would stir again, and that sense of fear, of furtive unrest, struggling at length to blind unreasoning panic – now mercifully stilled, thank God – might in some manner unforeseen become a living companion, as it had been before.
Rebecca, Daphne du Maurier

One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name.
Thomas Osbert Mordaunt,
quoted by Mr Justice Marshall
in his summing-up of the Stephen Ward trial,
30 July 1963
Telegraph

PROLOGUE

Cornwall, 1963

If you close your eyes, perhaps you can still see them. As they were that sundrenched afternoon, the day everything changed.

Outside the house, in the shadows by the terrace, when they thought no one was looking. Mary is in the kitchen making chicken salad and singing along to Music While You Work *on the Home Service. There's no one else around. It's the quiet before lunch, too hot to do anything.*

'Come on,' she says. She is laughing. 'Just one cigarette, and then you can go back up.' She chatters her little white teeth together, her pink lips wet. 'I won't bite, promise.'

He looks anxiously around him. 'All right.'

She has her back to him as she picks her way confidently through the black brambles and grey-green reeds, down the old path that leads to the sea. Her glossy hair is caught under the old green-and-yellow towel she has wrapped round her neck. He follows, nervously.

He's terrified of these encounters – terrified because he knows they're wrong, but still he wants them, more than he's wanted anything in his life. He wants to feel her honey-soft skin, to let his hand move up her thigh, to nuzzle her neck, to hear her cool, cruel laugh. He has known a couple of women: eager, rough-haired girls

at college, all inky fingers and beery breath, but this is different. He is a boy compared to her.

Oh, he knows it's wrong, what they're doing. He knows his head has been turned, by the heat, the long, light evenings, the intoxicating, almost frightening, sense of liberation here at Summercove, but he just doesn't care. He feels truly free at last.

The world is becoming a different place, there's something happening this summer. A change is coming, they can all feel it. And that feeling is especially concentrated here, in the sweet, lavender-soaked air of Summercove, where the crickets sing long into the night and where the Kapoors let their guests, it would seem, do what on earth they want . . . Being there is like being on the inside of one of those glass domes you have as a child, visible to the outside world, filled with glitter, waiting to be shaken up. The Kapoors know it too. They are all moths, drawn to the flickering candlelight.

'Hurry up, darling,' she says, almost at the bottom of the steps now, in the bright light, the white dots on her blue polka-dot swimming costume dancing before his eyes. He clings to the rope handle, terrified once more. The steps are dark and slippery, cut into the cliffs and slimy with algae. She watches him, laughing. She often makes him feel ridiculous. He's never been around bohemian people before. All his life, even now, he has been used to having rules, being told when to wash behind his ears, when to hand an essay in, used to the smell of sweaty boys – now young men – queuing for meals, changing for cricket. He's at the top of the pile, knows his place there, he's secure in that world.

He justifies it by saying this is different. It's one last hurrah, and he means to make the most of it, even if it is terrifying . . . He stumbles on a slippery step as she watches him from the beach, a cigarette dangling from her lip. His knee gives way beneath him, and for one terrifying moment he thinks he will fall, until he slams his other leg down, righting himself at the last minute.

'Careful, darling,' she drawls. 'Someone's going to get killed on those steps if they're not careful.'

Shaken, he reaches the bottom, and she comes towards him, handing him a cigarette, laughing. 'So clumsy,' she says, and he hates her in that moment, hates how sophisticated and smooth she is, so heedless of what she's doing, how wrong it is . . . He takes the cigarette but does not light it. He pulls her towards him instead, kissing her wet, plump pink lips, and she gives a little moan, wriggling her slim body against his. He can feel himself getting hard already, and her fingers move down his body, and he pushes her against the rock, and they kiss again.

'Have you always been this bad?' he asks her afterwards, as they are smoking their cigarettes. The heat of the sun is drying the sweat on their bodies. They lie together on the tiny beach, sated, as the waves crash next to them. A lost sandal, relic of someone else's wholly innocent summer day, is bobbing around at the edge of the tide. The cigarette is thick and rancid in his mouth. Now it's over, as ever, he is feeling sick.

She turns to him. 'I'm not bad.'

He thinks she is. He thinks she is evil, in fact, but he can't stay away from her. She smiles slowly, and he says, without knowing why he needs to say it, 'Look, it's been lots of fun. But I think it's best if—' He trails off. 'Break it off.'

Her face darkens for a second. 'You pompous ass.' She laughs, sharply. '"Break it off"? Break what off? There's nothing to break off. This isn't . . . anything.'

He is aware that he sounds stupid. 'I thought we should at least discuss it. Didn't want to give you the—' God, he wishes it were over. He finds himself giving her a little nod. 'Give you the wrong impression.'

'Oh, that's very kind of you.' She stubs the cigarette into the wet sand, and stands up, pulling the towel off the ground and around her again. He can't tell if she's angry or relieved, or – what? This is all beyond him, and it strikes him again that he's glad it will be over and that soon he can go back to being himself again, boring, ordinary, out of all this, normal.

'It's been—' he begins.

'Oh, fuck you,' she says. 'Don't you dare.' She turns to go, but as she does something comes tumbling down the steps. It is a small piece of black slate.

And then there is a noise, a kind of thudding. Footsteps.

'Who's there?' he says, looking up, but after the white light of the midday sun it is impossible to see anyone on the dark steps.

In the long years afterwards, when he never spoke about this summer, what happened, he would ask himself – because there was no one else he could ask: Who? His wife? His family? Hah – if he'd been wrong about what he'd seen. For, in that moment, he'd swear he could make out a small foot, disappearing back up onto the path to the house.

He turns back to her. 'Damn. Was that someone, do you think?'

She sighs. 'No, of course not. The path's crumbling, that's all. You're paranoid, darling.' She says lightly, 'As if they'd ever believe it of you, *anyway. Calm down. Remember, we're supposed to be grown-ups. Act like one.'*

She puts one hand on the rope and hauls herself gracefully up. 'Bye, darling,' she says, and he watches her go. 'Don't worry,' she calls. 'No one's going to find out. It's our little secret.'

But someone did. Someone saw it all.

PART ONE

February 2009

CHAPTER ONE

It is 7:16 a.m.

The train to Penzance leaves at seven-thirty. I have fourteen minutes to get to Paddington. I stand in a motionless Hammersmith and City line carriage, clutching the overhead rail so hard my fingers ache. I have to catch this train; it's a matter of life and death.

Quite literally, in fact – my grandmother's funeral is at two-thirty today. You're allowed to be an hour late for dinner, but you can't be an hour late for a funeral. It's a once-in-a-lifetime deal.

I've lived in London all my life. I know the best places to eat, the bars that are open after twelve, the coolest galleries, the prettiest spots in the parks. And I know the Hammersmith and City line is useless. I hate it. Why didn't I leave earlier? Impotent fury washes through me. And still the carriage doesn't move.

This morning, the sound of pattering rain on the quiet street woke me while it was still dark. I haven't been sleeping for a while, since before Granny died. I used to complain bitterly about my husband Oli's snoring, how he took up the whole bed, lying prone in a diagonal line. He's been away for nearly two weeks now. At first I thought it'd be good, if only

because I could catch up on sleep, but I haven't. I lie awake, thoughts racing through my head, one wide-awake side of my brain taunting the other, which is begging for rest. I feel mad. Perhaps I am mad. Although they say if you think you're going mad that definitely means you're not. I'm not so sure.

7:18 a.m. I breathe deeply, trying to calm down. It'll be OK. It'll all be OK.

Granny died in her sleep last Friday. She was eighty-nine. The funny thing is, it still shocked me. Booking my train tickets to come down to Cornwall, in February, it seemed all wrong, as though I was in a bad dream. I spoke to Sanjay, my cousin, over the weekend and he said the same thing. He also said, 'Don't you want to punch the next person in the face who says, "Eighty-nine? Well, she had a good innings, didn't she?" Like she deserved to die.'

I laughed, even though I was crying, and then Jay said, 'I feel like something's coming to an end, don't you? Something bigger than all of us.'

It made me shiver, because he is right. Granny was the centre of everything. The centre of my life, of our family. And now she's gone, and – I can't really explain it. She was the link to so many things. She was Summercove.

We're at Edgware Road, and it's 7:22 a.m. I might get it. I just might still get the train.

Granny and Arvind, my grandfather, had planned for this moment. Talked about it quite openly, as if they wanted everyone to be clear about what they wanted, perhaps because they didn't trust my mother or my uncle – Jay's dad – to follow their wishes. I'd like to believe that's not true, but I'm afraid it probably is. They specified what would happen when either one of them died first, what happens to the paintings in the house, the trust that is to be set up in Granny's memory, the scholarship that is funded in Arvind's memory, and what happens to Summercove.

Arvind is ninety. He is moving into a home. Louisa, my

mother's cousin, has taken charge of that. Louisa has taken charge of the funeral, too. She likes taking charge. She has picked everything that Granny didn't leave instructions about, from the hymns to the fillings in the sandwiches for the wake afterwards (a choice of egg mayonnaise, curried chicken or cucumber). Her husband, the handsome but extremely boring Bowler Hat, will be handing out the orders of service at the funeral and topping up drinks at the wake. Louisa is organising everything, and it is very kind of her, but we feel a bit left out, Jay and I. As ever, the Leighton side of the family has got it right, with their charming English polo-shirts-and-crumpets approach to life and we, the Kapoors, are left looking eccentric, disjointed, odd. Which I suppose we are.

Cousin Louisa is also in charge of packing up the house. For Summercove is to be sold. Our beautiful white art deco house perched between the fields and the sea in Cornwall will soon be someone else's. It is where Granny and my grandfather lived for fifty years, raised their children. I spent every summer of my life there. It's really the only home I've ever known and I'm the only one, it seems, who's sentimental about it, who can't bear to see it go. Mum, my uncle Archie, Cousin Louisa – even my grandfather – they're all brisk about it. I don't understand how they can be.

'Too many memories here,' Granny used to say when she'd talk about it, tell us firmly what was going to happen. 'Time for someone else to make some.'

Finally. The doors wobble open at Paddington and I rush out and run up the steps, pushing past people, muttering, 'Sorry, sorry.' Thank God it's the Hammersmith and City line – the exit opens right onto the vast concourse of the station. It is 7:28. The train leaves in two minutes.

The cold air hits me. I jab my ticket frantically in the barrier and run down the stairs to the wide platform, legs like jelly as I tumble down, faster and faster. I am nearly there, nearly

at the bottom . . . I glance up at the big clock. 7:29. Like a child, I jump the last three steps, my knees nearly giving way underneath me, and leap onto the train. I stand by the luggage racks, panting, trying to collect myself. There is a final whistle, the sound of doors slamming further along the endless snake of carriages. We are off.

I find a seat and sit down. My mother doesn't drive, so I know the ways of the train. The key to a good journey is not a table seat. I never understand why you would get one unless you knew everyone round the table. You end up spending five hours playing awkward footsie with a sweaty middle-aged man, or surrounded by a screaming, overexcited family. I slot myself into a window seat and close my eyes. A cool trickle of sweat slides down my backbone.

This is the train I took every summer, with Mum, to Summercove. Mum would bring me down, stay for a few days and then leave before the rest of her relatives arrived, and sometimes – but not often – before she and Granny could row about something: money, men, me.

It was always so much fun, the train down to Penzance when I was little. It was the anticipation of the holiday ahead, six weeks in Cornwall, six weeks with my favourite people in my favourite place. Mum would be in a strangely good mood on the train down, and so would I, both of us looking forward to diluting our twosome for a few weeks, away from our dark Hammersmith mansion flat, where the wallpaper peeled away from the walls, and in the summer the smell from the bins outside was noticeable. Bryant Court didn't suit summer. The noises inside and out got worse, scratching and strange, and the cast of characters in the building seemed to get less eccentric and more menacing. The hot weather seemed to dry them out, to make them more brittle and screeching. We were always euphoric to be out of there, away from it all.

Once, when we were on our way to Paddington and my mother was dragging me by the wrist towards a waiting cab,

bags slung over our shoulders, Mrs Pogorzelski hissed, 'Slut!' at Mum, as she opened the door. I didn't know what it meant, or why she was saying it. Mum bundled me into the black cab and we sat there grinning, surrounded by luggage, as we rolled up through Kensington towards the station, both of us complicit in some way that I couldn't define. That was also one of the times Mum forgot her purse, and the cab driver let us have a ride for free after she cried. She forgot her purse quite often, my mother.

She is at Summercove already, helping Cousin Louisa sort out the funeral and the house. She is convinced Louisa has her eye on some pieces of furniture already, convinced she is controlling everything. Archie, Mum's twin brother and Jay's dad, is there too. Mum and her cousin do not get on. But then Mum and a lot of people don't get on.

The train is flying through the outskirts of London, out past Southall and Heathrow, through scrubby wasteland that doesn't know whether it's town or countryside, towards Reading. I look around me for the first time since collapsing into my seat. I want a coffee, and I should have something to eat, though I'm not quite sure I can eat anything.

'Tickets, please,' says a voice above me. I jump, more violently than is warranted and the ticket inspector looks at me in alarm. I hand him my tickets – thankfully, I collected them at Liverpool Street, knowing the queues at Paddington would be horrendous. I blink, trying not to shake, as the desire to be sick, to faint, anything, sweeps over me again, and slump back against the scratchy seat, watching the inspector. He raises his eyebrows as he checks them over.

'Long way to be going for the day.'

'Yes,' I say. He looks at me, and I find myself saying, too eagerly, 'I have to be back in London tomorrow. There's an appointment first thing – I have an appointment I can't miss.'

He nods, but already I've given him too much information,

and I can feel myself flushing with shame. He's a Londoner, he doesn't want to chat. The trouble is, I want to talk to someone. I need to. A stranger, someone who I won't see again.

I haven't told my family I'm coming back tonight. Growing up with my mother, I learned long ago that the less you say, the less you get asked. The one person I would like to confide in is being buried today, in the churchyard at St Mary's, a tiny stone hut, so old people aren't sure when it was first built. In the churchyard there is the grave of a customs officer, one of many killed by desperate smugglers. There is a lot about Cornwall that is still kind of wild, pagan, and though the fish restaurants, tea shops and surfboards cover some of it up, they can't entirely conceal it.

Granny believed that. She was from Cornwall, she grew up near St Ives, on the wild north coast. She saw Alfred Wallis painting by the docks, she was born with the cry of seagulls and the wind whistling through the winding streets of the old town in her ears. She loved the landscape of her home county; it was her life, her job. She lived most of her life there, did her best work there, sitting in her studio high at the top of the house, overlooking the sea.

There are so many things I never asked her, and now I wish I had. So often that I wished I could confide in her, about all sorts of things, but knew I couldn't. For much as I loved my granny, I was scared of her too, of the blank look she'd get in her lovely green eyes sometimes when she looked at me. My husband Oli said once he sometimes thought she could see straight into your soul, like a witch. He was joking, but he was a little scared of her, and I know what he meant. There are some things you didn't ask her. Some things she wouldn't ever talk about.

Because for many years, Summercove was a very different place, centre of a glittering social whirl, and my grandparents were wealthy, successful, and it seemed as if they had the world

at their feet. But then their daughter Cecily died, two months short of her sixteenth birthday, and my grandmother stopped painting. She shut up her studio at the top of the house and, as far as I know, she never went back. I learned from a very early age never to ask why. Never to mention Cecily's name, even. There are no photos of her in the house, and no one ever talks about her. I know she died in 1963, and I know it was an accident of some kind, and I know Granny stopped painting after that, and that's about it.

We're going past Newbury, and the landscape is greener. There has been a lot of rain lately, and the rivers are swollen and brown under a grey sky. The fields are newly ploughed. A fast wind whips dead leaves over and around the train. I sit back and breathe out, feeling the nauseous knot of tension in my stomach start to slowly unravel, as a wave of something like calm washes over me. We are leaving London. We are getting closer.

CHAPTER TWO

My grandparents met in 1941, at a concert at the National Gallery. When the war broke out, Granny was nineteen, studying at St Martin's School of Art in London. She stayed there, despite her parents demanding she return to Cornwall. Not Frances, oh no. She volunteered to man the first-aid post near her digs in Bloomsbury, she was fire-watch officer for St Martin's, and when she had a spare hour, which was not many, she went to the National Gallery, around the corner from the college, to listen to Dame Myra Hess's lunchtime concerts.

Arvind (we have always called him that, Jay and I don't know why except he's not someone you'd ever think of calling 'Grandad', much less 'Gramps') was born in the ancient Mughal city of Lahore, in 1919. His father, a Punjabi Hindu, was a teacher at Aitchison College, an exclusive school for sons of maharajahs and landowners, so Arvind was entitled to a place there. Arvind was brilliant. So brilliant that the headteacher wrote to various dignitaries, and to people in England, and after two years of studying philosophy at Lahore's Government College (there's a photo of his matriculation on the wall of his study, rows of serious-looking young men with arms crossed and neat cowlicks), Arvind was given a post-graduate scholarship to Cambridge. It was on a research trip

to London during the height of the Blitz in 1941 that he wandered into the National Gallery.

I have a very clear image of them in my mind; Arvind, short and dapper, so politely dressed in his best tweed suit, his umbrella hooked over his arm, his hat clutched in his slender fingers, his eye falling briefly on the girl in front of him, watching the performance with total absorption. Granny was beautiful when she was old; when she was younger, she must have been extraordinary. I keep a photo of her from around that age in my studio: her dark-blond hair carefully swept into a chignon, her huge dark-green eyes set in a strong, open face, a curling, smart smile, perfect neat, white teeth.

Frances and Arvind were married three months later. Bizarrely for a man who has outlived most of his contemporaries, Arvind was told he had a weak heart and couldn't fight. He went back to Cambridge and finished his degree, where he and several other students were called upon to try a variety of code-breaking formulae. He also knitted socks – he rather took to it, he liked the patterns – and volunteered for the Home Guard. Granny stayed in London, to finish her studies and carry on driving the ambulances.

Though Granny and Arvind never said anything, I often wonder what her parents must have made of it. They were respectable, quiet people who rarely left Cornwall, with an elder daughter who had recently become engaged to a solicitor from a good family in Tring, and suddenly their wild, artistic younger daughter writes from a bomb shelter to let them know she's married a penniless student from India whom they've never met. This was seventy years ago. There was no one from France, let alone the Punjab, in Cornwall.

After Granny and Arvind were married, they rented a tiny flat in Redcliffe Square. Mum and Archie, the twins, were born in 1946 and then, a couple of years later, Cecily. Money was tight, Granny's painting and Arvind's writing did not bring in much; he was writing his book for years, paying the bills

with teaching jobs. The book became something of a joke after a while, to all of them, so the aspect of their married life that always took them by surprise, I think, is the money that came in when *The Modern Fortress* was finally published, in 1955. It argued that post-war society was in danger of reverting to a complacency and ossification that would lead to another world war of the magnitude of the one we had only just barely survived. It was translated into over thirty languages and become an instant modern classic, debated and argued over by millions, followed ten years later by *The Mountain of Light*, which initially sold even more, though it is now seen as the more 'difficult' of the two books. When I was fifteen, we had to read *The Modern Fortress* for GCSE History, as part of the course was about post-WW2 Europe. I am ashamed to say I understood not very much of it; even more ashamed to say I didn't tell the teacher at school that Arvind Kapoor was my grandfather. I don't know why.

While *The Modern Fortress* was selling thousands of copies a week, Granny's paintings were becoming more acclaimed too and suddenly Frances and Arvind were richer than they'd ever expected to be. They could afford to buy the house they'd rented for a couple of summers in Cornwall for Frances to paint in, a dilapidated twenties art deco place by the sea called Summercove. They could send the children to boarding school. They could keep the flat in London and a housekeeper for Summercove, and they could have their nieces and nephews to stay, and provide a degree of largesse to all they knew. This meant that, for the rest of the fifties and the early sixties, Arvind Kapoor and Frances Seymour, and Summercove, were bywords amongst artistic and intellectual circles in London for an elegantly bohemian way of life, post-colonial poster children: the couple that seemed to have everything.

In Granny's bedroom at Summercove, there is a curved, dark-wooden dressing table, with a beautiful enamel hairbrush set,

old glass crystal perfume bottles and two jewellery boxes. The dressing table has little drawers with wrought-iron handles on each side, and once when I was little and I'd crept upstairs to surprise her, I found my grandmother sitting at that table, gazing at a photo.

She was very still, her back straight. Through the long suntrap windows you could see across the meadow down to the path, the bright blue-green sea glinting in the distance. I watched her as she stared at the photo, stroking it with her finger, tentatively, as if it had some talismanic quality.

'Boo,' I'd said softly, because I didn't know what else to do, and I knew it wasn't right to jump out at her now. I didn't want her to be angry with me.

She did jump though, and she turned to me. Then she held out her hand. 'Oh, Natasha,' she said, as I stood looking at her.

I adored my grandmother, who was beautiful, funny, charismatic, in charge of everything, always in control: I found her hugely comforting, thrilling too, but the truth is she was also a little terrifying. Compared to her happy, open relationship with Jay, I felt sometimes, just sometimes, she looked at me and wished I wasn't there. I don't know why. But children like me – with an overactive imagination and no one with whom to exercise it – are often wrong. And I knew that if I ever tried to talk to my mother about it she'd tell me I was making things up, or worse, confront Granny, and have a row with her.

'Come here,' she said, looking at me, and she smiled, her hand outstretched. I walked towards her slowly, wanting to run, because I loved her so much and I was so glad she wanted me. I stood in front of her and put my hands on her lap, tentatively. She stroked my hair, hard, and I felt a tear drop from her eyes onto my forehead.

'God, you're just like her,' she said, her voice husky, and clutched my wrist with her strong fingers. She twisted the fingers of her other hand over to show me the photo she was

holding. It was a small, yellowing snap of a girl about my age; I was then around seven or eight. I wish I could remember more, because I think it was important. I remember she had dark hair, but of course she did, we all did. She looked like Mum, but also not: I couldn't work out why.

'Yes, you're just like her.' Granny drew a great shuddering breath, and her grip on my arm tightened. 'Damn it all.' She turned, her huge green eyes swimming with tears, her lovely face twisted and ugly. 'Get out! Get out of here, now!'

She was still gripping my arm, so hard it was bruised the next day. I wrenched myself free and ran away, feet clattering on the parquet floor, out onto the lawn, away from the dark, sad room. I didn't understand it, how could I?

Later, when we were having tea and playing hide-and-seek, she came up and gave me a hug.

'How's my favourite girl?' she said, and she dropped a soft kiss onto my forehead. 'Come here, let me show you this brooch I found in my jewellery box. Do you want to wear it tonight, at supper with the grown-ups?'

I didn't know it then, but I saw a side of her that day that she rarely showed anyone any more. She kept it locked away, like the photo, like her studio. I tried to push it out of my mind that summer, and when I got back to London. And now. It's not the way I want to remember her.

We are heading further and further west, the landscape is wilder, and though spring feels far away, there are tiny green buds on the black branches fringing the railway tracks. We go through southern Somerset, past Castle Cary and the Glastonbury Tor. I stare out of the window, as if willing myself to see more.

Oli and I went to Glastonbury last summer, because of his job – one of his clients gave us VIP tickets, with backstage passes. We were very lifestyle that weekend – I wore my new Marc Jacobs city shorts and some Cath Kidston polka-dot

wellies, Oli was in his best Dunhill shirt: we felt like a low-rent Kate Moss and Jamie Hince. We saw Jay-Z, and Amy Winehouse, and the Hoosiers, who I love but Oli thinks are crap. It was great, of course, although I remember going in a camper van when I was nineteen with Jay and my best friend Cathy, the year of the legendary Radiohead gig, not washing for three days and being stoned the whole time, and that was better somehow, less complicated, no one in a mood, no one looking dissatisfied because there are only two free beers in the wanky hospitality tent where everyone's terrified they're less important than everyone else. Oli complained when they wouldn't give him another one. Oh, Oli.

I look out of the window, blinking back tears, and nod: there is the perfect little village with a beautiful house and golden-yellow church, plonked seemingly in the middle of nowhere, that I kept my eyes glued to the window looking for every year when I was little. The fields are flooded; there are confused ducks swimming in the water, not sure what to make of it. Up on the banks by the tracks, cobwebby Old Man's Beard covers everything, the beautiful tracery concealing the hard branches beneath. Thankful for the distraction, I stare, wondering where my sketchbook is, anything to take my mind off it all.

Granny loved jewellery. I'm sure that my interest in it stems from the hours I spent with her looking at her pieces, holding them up and thrilling to the sensation of metal and stone on my skin, against my face. The two big jewellery boxes on that dressing table were neatly stacked with all kinds of wondrous things: a chunky jade pendant, worn on a thick silver chain, tiny diamond dangly earrings that she bought for herself when she had her first show (it occurs to me now that these were valuable; she kept them quite blithely with the costume jewellery), delicate strings of creamy coral, a gold Egyptian-style collar necklace that she got from the Royal Opera House, a prop from *Aida* which she used on a model for a painting, a large

amethyst ring that was her mother's, and finally the two that were never in the box, because she was always wearing them. The thick gold-linked bracelet studded with turquoises which Arvind gave her for her thirtieth birthday, and the pale-gold ring she always wore on her right hand, of three sets of two intertwined diamond flowers, like tiny peonies. It is a family ring: Arvind's father sent it from Lahore when they were married. That was my favourite piece of them all, a link with Arvind's family, the country he left long ago. Because I vaguely remember Granny's father, but I never met Arvind's father, nor any of his family. Two of his brothers died during Partition, and his father stayed in Lahore. He never saw his son again.

So Granny's jewellery box was like an Aladdin's cave for me, and now, when I sit in my studio, sketching out designs, working out different ways to coat something with gold leaf, searching for an enameller who won't demand payment right away, often I am reminded where I first got my inspiration from: Granny's jewellery box, the almost terrifying pleasure of being allowed to look inside it.

Now, gazing at the bare branches black in the grey light, I let my mind drift. I think how lovely a silver necklace linked with tiny branches would look, and I wonder how easy – or extremely difficult – it would be to replicate the delicate, sugar-spun tracery covering them. I should make a sketch in the ideas book I used to carry with me, always. I haven't drawn in it for ages. Haven't come up with anything for ages.

Five years ago, when I had a stall of my own and was making just enough money to afford the flat share in West Norwood and the occasional item from Topshop, life was simple. Now, we live in a trendy apartment off Brick Lane and I have a flashy website and a husband who earns enough money telling clients that their toothpaste's branding is too male-oriented to keep us both.

So really, it shouldn't matter that tomorrow I might lose my business, should it? Lose everything I've worked for and

dreamed about, ever since the long-ago days when I'd climb onto Granny's stool and open her jewellery box, my mouth gaping in wonder. Strange that the two things are so close together. Her funeral, my summons.

I shake my head, and the cold, clammy fear that, lately, always seems to be with me grips me again. No. I'm not thinking about that today. Not today, Granny's funeral, not today. They'll tell me tomorrow. I just have to get through today.

My phone buzzes and I look down.

> Missed you again last night. When are we going to talk? Ox

Now I am going to be sick. No sleep, no breakfast, on top of everything else, and this time I know it. I stumble towards the lavatories, pushing open the rank, sticky doors, and I vomit, retching loudly, bile flooding out of me; it feels almost cleansing. People must be able to hear.

I'm trying not to cry at the same time, pushing my hair out of my mouth. I stand up and look in the mirror, tears running down my cheeks, because I feel so awful, so sad, every protective layer I cover myself with ripped off and suddenly the almost cartoon terribleness of it makes me start to laugh. Suddenly I remember Cathy saying to me, 'Has anyone ever explained to Oli that when he signs off with his initial and a kiss he's writing the word "Ox"?'

I smile, I look dreadful, lank brown hair hanging about my sallow face, dark-brown shadows under my startlingly green eyes. People at school called me alien because of my eyes; I hated it. I hadn't thought of that for ages either and it makes me smile again. I wipe my mouth on a tissue. I will go to the canteen and get a coffee, a banana. I feel better, purged.

Slowly, I open the door, embarrassed in case someone is outside and has overheard, and I hear two voices, approaching briskly.

'My best guess is we'll be five mins late, no more,' the first, a male voice, is saying.

'I'll call Mummy. God knows she's got enough to do without us holding her up today.'

I freeze. *No way.*

'Bloody good thing Guy's already there,' the male voice says, languidly, but with a hint of menace I remember of old. 'We need someone to sort through that house, make sure the valuable stuff gets treated properly. I mean, those paintings must be worth a bob or two . . .'

Julius and Octavia. I shrink back against the door as they march past, catching only a glimpse of Octavia's sensible brown flat boots, grey wool skirt and her hand, clutching a twenty-pound note, as they stride purposefully past on their way to the buffet car, a Leighton phalanx of aggressive righteousness. I don't know why it surprises me – this is the only train from London that gets to Penzance in time for the funeral, but of all people Julius and Octavia are not who I would have chosen to bump into, post-vomit, outside the First Great Western lav.

They are Louisa's children, and so they are my second cousins, and though I spent almost every summer of my life with them, there is no emotional connection to show for it. If you knew Octavia and Julius, though, you might understand why. They were even given Roman names, I think to reflect their parents' passion for discipline and order. I hear Julius's posh voice again. *'Bloody good thing Guy's already there.'*

My skin prickles with silent rage. Guy is their uncle on their father's side. He is an antiques dealer. I never knew he was close to Granny, or our family. I grit my teeth at the thought of Guy going through Granny's paintings, her jewellery box, with Louisa standing behind with a clipboard, ticking stuff off on a list. They are very *definite* people, the Leightons. I love Louisa, she's kind and thoughtful, and she does mean well, I think, but she can be dreadfully bossy. The four of

them, her, the Bowler Hat, Julius and Octavia, are all terribly – not hearty exactly, more – *confident*. The confidence that comes from living in Tunbridge Wells, being a civil servant, going to a public school, being a unit of four, a proper family. All things I am not.

I wait until their voices have faded into the distance and, cautiously, I creep back to my seat, a little shaky still, and stare out of the window again. Two fat crows are picking away at the mossy roof of a disused barn. Above them, the skies are opening wider and wider, and birds wheel through the air. We're getting there, we are nearly in Exeter. My phone buzzes again.

> I can't keep saying I'm sorry. We have to talk. Thinking of you today. When are you back? Ox

Ox. I switch my phone off and close my eyes, turning my head to the window in case the others walk past, and, thankfully, I drift off to sleep.