

CHAPTER ONE

January 1926

‘What are you doing?’

Patsy Doyle started at the sound of her employer’s voice and the coal scuttle slipped through her hands, falling with a thud onto the carpet. Lumps of coal spilt out in a cloud of dust. ‘Sorry, sir!’ She straightened the scuttle and began to pick up the pieces. Her hands in the soiled suede gloves trembled and her damaged finger throbbled painfully.

David Tanner picked up several lumps of coal and limped over to place them in the scuttle. ‘I don’t know why I agreed to have you here. An older, more experienced woman would have been more sensible.’

Patsy pressed her lips tightly together on the hot words that threatened to spill out. 'I can't help being young, sir, but I'm getting older by the day.'

'Yes, and with a pronounced tendency to answer back,' he said dryly, dropping the hearth brush and shovel beside her. 'Clear up this mess and get the fire going.'

'Yes, sir.' She slanted him a glance and thanked God he wasn't as quick-tempered as his wife.

David Tanner was a tall man with an austere, lean face and floppy light-brown hair. He was in his late twenties but looked older because of the lines that pain had etched about his mouth and eyes. He rested an elbow on the mantelshelf and stared at her moodily. 'What time did my wife go out?'

'Early this morning. She wanted to be at the opening of the Bon Marché sales.'

He frowned. 'But it's half-past five! She should have been back ages ago. Did she say whether she was going on anywhere else? Perhaps to Seaforth to see her mother?'

'She didn't mention it to me but with the lull in the bad weather perhaps she decided to do just that.'

'She really ought to make some effort to be here when I come home from work. Did she say anything more to you? I've heard some wives do make confidantes of their maids.'

‘I don’t know what a confidante is, sir.’

He sighed. ‘Someone to tell things to that she wouldn’t tell anyone else, such as her husband.’

Patsy said cautiously, ‘Are we talking secrets here, sir?’ She gazed at him with wide-eyed innocence.

‘Yes! Indeed, we are.’

‘Then I’m not one of those thingamabobs yer just mentioned.’

‘Never mind,’ he said tetchily before changing tack. ‘Why didn’t you light the fire earlier? It’s freezing in here.’

‘Orders from the missus, sir. Trouble with the miners, shortage of coal.’

‘Well, she may have a point there. Has the evening paper arrived?’

‘Yes, sir. Yer’ll find it on the occasional table.’

‘Don’t keep calling me *sir*. I’ve never been knighted.’

‘Then what am I to call you?’

‘Mr Tanner.’ He moved away from the fireplace and sat on the sofa and picked up the *Liverpool Echo*.

Patsy tended to the fire. Moments later she was conscious of him hovering over her as she performed the task of brushing up the coal dust.

‘Did my wife mention what she intended to buy in the sales? Was it a new dance frock? She is fond of dancing as you’ll no doubt have realised.’

Patsy straightened up and almost collided with him. 'I doubt she'll get what she's really after in the sales in that case.'

'You mean she mentioned something specific?' He looked alarmed.

'A velvet-lined cloak of silver lamé finished with silver fox fur. It's the latest from Paris as seen in the *Echo* last week.'

'Oh my God,' he groaned. 'You mean she planned on buying that as well as a dance frock? Does the woman think I'm made of money? I want her to have what she wants and to be happy, but...' Words seemed to fail him and he perused the pages of the newspaper. 'Would you believe it! They're showing a film called *Ypres* at the cinema. You can bet it'll be a glorified version of what actually happened.' He pushed himself upright and limped over to the window.

Patsy skirted him and made for the door into the lobby.

'Wait!'

She almost jumped out of her skin. 'Yes, sir?'

'Do you happen to recall what Mrs Tanner was wearing when she went out?'

'A beaver hat and a reversible tweed cape over a flared green skirt, a cream blouse and a forest-green cardigan,' listed Patsy. 'She looked very nice.'

'My wife is always excellently turned out.'

Patsy noticed that he was frowning again and wondered if he suspected his wife of meeting someone: a man, for instance. 'Is there anything else, Mr Tanner?'

'No, you can go.' He turned towards the fireplace and took a cheroot case from his pocket. From a jar on the mantelshelf he took a spill and, with a hand that shook slightly, took a light from the fire and lit his cheroot. Then he sat down and picked up the newspaper again.

Patsy considered it was odd that he should ask her not to call him *sir* all of a sudden. In her experience most men liked you to treat them like they were your lord and master. Perhaps he was trying to soften her up for something. She hurried to the kitchen and closed the door behind her. She rested her back against it and let out a long breath. It wasn't that Mr Tanner frightened her but he did make her edgy when she was alone with him. He was another ex-soldier who had experienced more than was good for him in the war.

Mrs Tanner had told her that, unlike those men who had lost limbs, the damage to her husband was hidden from the world. She had spoken in a tight-lipped kind of way and fiddled with her engagement and wedding rings as she had done so. Patsy's heart had been touched by this gesture of vulnerability and she had accepted the position

of all-purpose maid, not only because she needed the money and a roof over her head, but because she had felt sorry for the woman. There had been times since when Patsy had regretted her decision.

Her previous employer, an old widow woman, had treated her strictly, but kindly as well. A Friend of the Seamen's Orphanage, she had also taught Patsy to speak properly, so that she only lapsed into her native Scouse when under stress. She had provided Patsy with her first job after leaving the orphanage and had trained her to a high standard. Sadly the old woman had died on the same day as the queen mother, Queen Alexandra, last November. Such was the old lady's generosity that she had left five pounds to Patsy in her will. She had been cock-a-hoop about her inheritance and placed most of it in her rainy-day fund.

Within days of losing that position, one of the orphanage's guardians had suggested Patsy apply for the post in the Tanner household in Anfield Road. A large house, with a long front garden, it was close to Liverpool football ground. When the team was playing at home, she could often hear the roar of the crowd when a goal was scored. The house was just over an hour's walking distance from the orphanage where four of her siblings still lived. Sometimes she was able to arrange a Saturday afternoon off so she could visit them.

Still, there were times when she felt put upon by Mrs Tanner.

Patsy tossed the soiled gloves into a box in a corner and frowned as she put on the vegetables and checked the steak braising in the oven. While part of her job was preparing the vegetables, she had not been hired as a cook. It wasn't that she did not like cooking, but getting a meal just right was a big responsibility. She would not be sixteen until March. Yet here she was, left in charge of seeing to the evening meal. It wasn't right and she was only paid five shillings a week and cooks earned a lot more than that. Mrs Tanner should have been here overseeing her, not gallivanting. Besides, past experience had made Patsy wary of being left alone in the house with a man.

Her blood still ran cold when she thought of her mother's brother. Not that Mr Tanner was the least bit like Patsy's dead uncle but she was going to be on pins until his wife arrived home. Then you could bet there would be a low-voiced rebuke from Mr Tanner for her being in late, which appeared to irritate Mrs Tanner. She could be really nasty to him at times and on more than one occasion Patsy had received a reprimand that was more severe than the mistake warranted.

She held out her right hand which still hurt. On the first evening of the new year, Mrs Tanner had caught her picking up a couple of sugar lumps

that had fallen onto the tablecloth. Absently Patsy had used her fingers instead of the tongs. Mrs Tanner had grabbed her hand and forced her to drop the lumps on the fire. Perhaps she did not know her own strength but the pain had caused Patsy to cry out.

The sound drew Mr Tanner's attention away from his book and he had demanded to know what was going on. The next moment the incident had turned nasty, with Mrs Tanner rounding on her husband and calling him an interfering swine. He had told her not to hurt the girl, before stalking out of the morning room, saying that he would be eating out and Patsy could have the evening off. Mrs Tanner had gone into the hall and used the telephone. Patsy had not been able to overhear the conversation but the upshot was that Mrs Tanner also went out. So Patsy had shared the dinner with the cat.

Later when Mrs Tanner had returned she was all smiles, telling Patsy that she had been with a friend to see *Charley's Aunt* at the Futurist cinema in Lime Street. Then she had mixed herself a vodka Martini before going to bed. Patsy had heard Mr Tanner arrive home just before midnight and go into his bedroom. And that was another odd thing about the Tanners, they had separate bedrooms.

She found the Tanners' behaviour towards each other baffling. They were young, attractive

and, what with Mr Tanner being a solicitor, they appeared to have enough money to afford a comfortable lifestyle. So why the separate bedrooms and so many disagreements?

Patsy was roused from her reverie by a hissing noise. 'Oh hell!' She acted swiftly to move the potatoes from the gas ring. Just then she heard the door knocker sound and hurried to answer its summons.

'I forgot my key,' said Mrs Tanner, brushing past Patsy to place several parcels on the hall table. 'Is my husband home?'

'Yes, madam. He's been in at least half an hour and wanted to know where you'd gone.'

'As any caring husband would, Patsy,' said Mrs Tanner, sounding unexpectedly good-humoured. She removed her hat and shook it, scattering raindrops all over the girl.

Patsy wiped her face with the back of her hand and watched her hang up her cape. 'You had a successful shopping trip, madam?' she asked politely.

'Yes, indeedy.' Mrs Tanner fluffed out her blonde hair and gazed at her reflection in the hall mirror. 'Hopefully my husband won't want to know the price of everything I've bought.' Her pale-green eyes narrowed and she touched her mouth where the lipstick was smudged. 'I think I deserve little treats for what I have to put up with.'

‘There’s no need to say that, Rose.’

She started at the sound of her husband’s voice.

‘Darling, how softly you creep up on one.’
Rose crossed the hall to where David stood and pecked his cheek.

Frowning, he wiped away the lipstick. ‘Where’ve you been all this time?’

Instantly Rose turned on Patsy. ‘Didn’t you tell my husband that I was meeting my friend, Joan? Really, Patsy, your memory! Did you have the sense to put the casserole in the oven?’

Patsy said, ‘Dinner will be ready when you are, madam.’

‘Good. I’m starving.’ She glanced at her husband. ‘You’re hungry, aren’t you, David?’

‘Your concern for my well-being is touching but really you should be here overseeing the girl, not gallivanting round town on shopping sprees. We didn’t hire her as a cook.’

‘Oh, don’t start that again,’ snapped Rose. ‘Or one day I’ll go out and never come back.’

‘Hardly the first time you’ve threatened to do that, dear. Don’t try my patience too far.’ He took his wife by the arm and ushered her into the drawing room.

Patsy returned to the kitchen. She could not help wondering what was happening in the drawing room and decided to make a pot of tea and put some home-made cheese biscuits on a plate and

take them through to the Tanners. After all, there was always the chance that she was mistaken about Mr Tanner not being violent. She prepared a tray and carried it to the drawing room and knocked on the door. 'I've brought a pot of tea,' she called.

'Come in!' shouted David.

Patsy entered the room. Straight away, she noticed that her employer was standing over by the window, gazing out over the darkened garden, but his wife was close to the fire, humming to herself as she held up a dress in front of her. Patsy placed the tray on the occasional table.

David limped over to the sofa and sat down. He took a biscuit and munched on it. A surprised expression came over his face. 'Did you make these?'

'Yes. I had the recipe from Miss Kirk.' She looked at him anxiously. 'I thought they tasted a bit of all right.'

'They taste more than all right. Well done.'

Patsy beamed at him. 'Thank you. Miss Kirk was a real good teacher.'

'Was she someone who taught at the orphanage?'

'Oh, no! It was after my mother died that I met her. Us Doyle children were taken in by a Mr and Mrs Bennett, because there was no room at the Seamen's Orphanage at the time. Mrs Bennett's

dead now but I'll never forget her kindness. Miss Kirk was her housekeeper and she showed me how to cook all sorts of things. We were happy there,' she added softly.

'They were obviously a couple who liked children,' said David Tanner, and a shadow seemed to darken his eyes. 'Did they have any children of their own?'

Patsy shook her head. 'No. Sadly, Mr Bennett is elderly and couldn't cope with us after his wife died. Us kids were put in the orphanage except for my youngest brother who was adopted.' The girl sighed. 'I do miss him because I'd been like a mother to him. Mam never could cope with us even when Dad was alive and on shore leave.'

'But surely you are glad that your little brother has a proper home with people who love him?' said David.

'Of course,' said Patsy. 'Is that all for now, sir?'

Rose placed a dress on the arm of an easy chair. 'Hang on there a minute, Patsy. This Mr Bennett, is he a musician?'

'Yes! Have you heard of him, Mrs Tanner?'

'Yes,' said Rose. 'He really knows his stuff.'

'It's a small world,' said Patsy, remembering Mr Bennett played in a dance band.

'You can go now, Patsy. Thank you for the biscuits,' said David.

‘It’s a pleasure,’ she said, feeling unusually light-hearted after their exchange.

She was on her way out of the room when she was called back. ‘I think it’ll be more sensible, Patsy, if you serve dinner in here, rather than the dining room,’ said David. ‘We must conserve our stocks of coal if my wife is not only buying new clothes but dancing the afternoons away.’

‘Not every afternoon, David,’ said Rose in honeyed tones. ‘I went to see Mother the other day. If you’d only take me dancing yourself occasionally I wouldn’t need to go with Joan.’

Patsy did not wait to hear his response but hurried out of the room, pulling the door shut behind her. It did not catch properly and she heard him say, ‘I don’t believe this friend exists.’

Rose’s penetrating tones drifted towards her. ‘You would say that but I’ll bring her to meet you one evening. She has a very demanding mother just like mine and the tea dances are her only pleasure. I don’t go there to meet other men, if that’s what you’re thinking. After all, I have you, don’t I, *darling*?’

‘You don’t have to lay it on with a trowel. I’m no fool. Anyway, what do you think about what Patsy told us?’

Patsy’s ears pricked up.

‘About what?’ asked Rose sharply.

‘Her brother being adopted. We could adopt

a child,' he said with an eagerness that touched Patsy.

'What on earth for?' Rose sounded horrified.

'Wouldn't you even consider it?' he pleaded.

'I've given you my final word and truthfully, David, I don't know how long I can go on like this!'

'People have worse lives. Patsy, for instance. It must have been tough, losing her mother and having to enter the orphanage.'

'Oh, never mind that girl! I wish you wouldn't talk to her as if she was one of us. I don't admire these socialist tendencies of yours. The working classes don't need any encouragement to bring down the structures already in place in society. This is about my life and my needs,' cried Rose.

An angry Patsy moved away, thinking that her mother would have called Rose Tanner *a right bitch*. She seemed to have no idea how the other half lived. She could have told the Tanners just how tough her past had been but Patsy was trying to build herself a new life. As it was, the past still haunted her. Even before her father had been lost at sea, her mother was too fond of the gin, and during the war she'd had a fancy man. By the time hostilities had ended there had been three more Doyles in addition to Patsy, Mick and Kathleen. Anthony had arrived after the news had come about her father being

washed overboard and the family had been in dire straits.

Patsy sighed as she remembered how she had struggled to keep the family together. It had been a terrible time but at least they'd had each other. She missed her brothers and sisters and wished that they could all be together again. If she could become a proper cook, one that could live out and earn enough to pay rent on a house, that would be great. She wrote to her siblings once a week but it was not the same as living under the same roof. She wished she could be as free as Rose Tanner to do what she wanted. Her husband might complain about her actions, yet so far he had not stopped her gallivanting. But from what had been said earlier it sounded like there was change in the air, and what would happen to Patsy then?

She removed the casserole from the oven and breathed in the delicious smell of steak in onion gravy. She warmed the plates and served the food. Then she carried the tray to the drawing room, only to pause outside when she heard raised voices.

She knocked loudly and called, 'Dinner!'

The voices stopped and the door was opened by David who took the tray from her. 'That will be all, Patsy.'

'If yer need seconds, sir...?'

‘We’ll let you know.’ He closed the door with his hip.

Patsy returned to the kitchen and ate her dinner and fed the cat. No one came and asked for seconds. Half an hour later she returned to the sitting room to clear away. She could hear the strains of music and thought it a nice change from the couple arguing but she needed to knock several times before the door opened.

Rose stood there, half in half out of a dress. Patsy stared at her in surprise and then backed away. ‘Sorry, Mrs Tanner, I didn’t mean to—’

Rose rolled her eyes. ‘Don’t be stupid, Patsy! I need help here with these buttons.’

‘What about your husband?’

‘He’s gone for a walk. Come in. See to the gramophone first, will you? It needs winding up.’

‘But why are you trying on a dress in here?’

‘Use your brains, girl. It’ll be bloody freezing upstairs; much warmer down here by the fire. I’ve a couple of others I want to try on. If any of them need altering, you can sort out what has to be done.’

‘If you say so, madam,’ muttered Patsy.

She stared at the back of the dress and saw that the buttons started way down at the base of Rose’s spine and only half of them were fastened. Patsy did up the rest as far as she could but the dress was a little tight across Rose’s shoulder blades.

'I can't fasten the top six, missus,' she said.

'But it's got to fasten,' cried Rose in a panicky voice. 'And don't call me missus! It's madam.'

'Yes, madam,' said Patsy, her voice expressionless.

'I want to wear it on Wednesday afternoon. You can't be doing it properly. It needs pulling round.'

'I'm doing my best, Mrs Tanner, but there isn't a bit of spare material to pull round.'

'This dress was a real bargain. I can't have put on weight.' Rose's fingers inched round her back in an attempt to drag the material together but without success. She swore vehemently, using words that Patsy had heard often enough when the Doyles had lived in the hovel, near Scotty Road, but never from the lips of a woman who was supposed to be her superior.

She was shocked into exclaiming, 'Madam!'

'Oh, shut up, Patsy, I've no doubt you've heard worse. Think of something! I must wear this dress.'

Patsy had to admit that it was a lovely dress, made of cerise georgette, with loosely flowing panels of pink. She checked the label and saw that it was a size smaller than Rose Tanner normally wore. No use telling madam that, though. 'May I make a suggestion?'

'Of course! That's what I've just asked you to do,' snapped Rose.

‘If a couple of the panels were removed, it might be possible to unpick the sides of the dress and insert an extra couple of inches where needed. If anyone said anything you could say it’s part of the design.’

Rose’s face brightened. ‘Of course, I’m sure I would have thought of that if I hadn’t been so flustered. Help me off with the dress and you can get on with altering it.’

Patsy hoped her idea would work. It was her sister, Kathleen, who was the artistic one with a good eye for colour and pattern. Patsy began the task of unpicking the sides of the dress while Rose tried on the other two dresses.

‘These fit perfectly,’ she said.

‘Couldn’t you wear one of them?’ asked Patsy.

‘No! They’re attractive in their way but can’t match the cerise one. How are you getting on? I want it fixed before my husband returns.’

‘Perhaps I should take it up to my room and sew it there if you don’t want him coming in on us,’ suggested Patsy.

‘Good idea.’ Rose’s eyes sparkled. ‘I’ll tell him that I’ve sent you to bed because you have a blinding headache. I’ll even bring you up a cup of cocoa in an hour to see how you’re getting on.’

‘Thank yer, madam,’ said Patsy dryly.

‘You not yer, Patsy,’ rebuked Rose. ‘One good turn deserves another. You have all you need?’

‘Yes, madam,’ said Patsy.

‘Excellent,’ said Rose, patting her shoulder.

Patsy left the sitting room with the dress over her arm. It would be freezing up in her attic bedroom but at least she would be left alone to get on with altering the dress. After that she would write a letter to her siblings and her monthly one to her friend Tilly in America.

Patsy thought how life at the orphanage had come as a shock. She and her sisters were segregated from their two brothers and were only allowed to see Mick and Jimmy for a few hours on a Saturday. The food was tasteless and unimaginative and the rules were strict. There was little love to be found in that grim building. They were taught the three Rs and the girls were instructed in knitting, crochet and needlework.

When the time came to leave, Patsy was glad to go out in the world, although it was a wrench being parted from her family. The year after she had left the orphanage, her brother Mick signed up for the ship *Indefatigable*, to train for a life at sea. This coming Easter, her sister Kathleen would also be leaving the orphanage. No doubt she would also be found a job in service, which meant that only twelve-year-old Jimmy and the eight-year-old twins, Maureen and Mary, would remain there.

Patsy smiled at the thought of the twins:

so alike to look at and yet so different. It had become almost second nature to Patsy to unburden herself in her letters to Tilly when there were matters worrying her. The goings-on at the Tanner household were a regular feature.

Unfortunately, by the time Patsy had finished the alterations to the dress, her bruised finger was throbbing more than it had done earlier. Perhaps if she rested it for a while it would be better in an hour or so. Mrs Tanner had not made an appearance despite what she had said about bringing Patsy a drink of cocoa, so the girl decided to take the dress to her.

She was halfway down the attic stairs when she heard the Tanners talking in the hall. Rose was telling her husband about Patsy's fictitious headache and so the girl retreated to her bedroom. She did not have long to wait before her mistress arrived, minus the mug of cocoa.

'You've finished it!' Rose exclaimed. 'Good.'

'I hope it fits.'

'It had better.' Rose gave a slight laugh as she picked up the dress and stroked the material. She inspected the inserts and looked at Patsy. 'They appear to be all right. Goodnight.' Without further word, she left the room, closing the door behind her.

Patsy stared at the door moodily. Selfish madam! She went over to the chest of drawers and paused

a moment, gazing at the wooden dolphin on top of it. She picked up the carving and ran a finger over its smooth surface. Her father had whittled away at this graceful creature while at sea. She still missed him and wished her last memory of him was not of his having a terrible row with her mother over a man. He had stormed out saying that he might not be coming back. And he hadn't! She didn't suppose that he had meant that he would die at sea.

Patsy replaced the dolphin and took out her writing materials. She gritted her teeth whilst writing because her finger was still painful and she wished all sorts of nasty things to befall Rose Tanner. When finished, Patsy viewed the pages with dismay. Her handwriting was a terrible scrawl and she could only hope that Tilly would be able to make sense of the words on the page all those miles away across the Atlantic in New York.