

Chapter One

I had the dream again. And there she was again. The little girl.

She was standing, as she always stands, on the bank of the river. Grass green beneath her feet. Little red shoes, little white dress. Dark hair caught in a red ribbon at her neck. She never changes. She just stands, while beyond her the river is brown and rushing, waits for nobody. Except maybe for just one person.

I have never seen her face.

Then it comes – the fear. The absolute certainty that any moment she is going to take a step. Her small red shoes will carry her into the river, and the waters will close over her head. The bank will be empty and it will seem as if she had never been...

At which point Tom rolls over in his sleep, flings his arm across my shoulders and instantly I'm awake. There is no child, no riverbank, no little red shoes. All gone – until the next time. And there will be a next time. I've dreamt this dream since I was four years old, about the same age she is. I've grown older, but she stays the same; poised on the riverbank, about to take that one step away from me. Away from everything.

The dream is an old one. It will come again. And again. And I will always be afraid.

I move Tom's arm from off my shoulders, gently, without

waking him. Every night he sleeps with his arms flung round me like a drowning man clinging to a spar. Then I wait, listening to the traffic reaching all the way from Archway in the glowing dark that is London. A steady throb of engines from far off, like the engine of the world itself, the thing that keeps us all going, keeps us alive.

I've always liked it, the sound of the city. I would sleep with the windows wide open, lulled by the sound of distant lorries echoing in the spaces below the bridges. Not like Tom.

In London, the bridges span not rivers but roads. That's not to say there are no rivers but they run secretly, through underground channels or else disguised as canals. Straight sides carved by men. When they emerge, it's shyly, trickling out of tunnels into the Thames, only visible at low tide. Away from the Thames, you don't have to think about rivers at all if you don't want to.

Tom's arm creeps back across my shoulders. Maybe that's it: maybe he really does dream he's drowning, even if he doesn't remember the next day. It's heavier than ever now, but I don't have the heart to move it again.

That dream. I haven't always been frightened. When I was little I just wanted to see her face. So long as she looked at me before she stepped into the river, it wouldn't have occurred to me to worry about what came after.

It's only at night I think of Tom as drowning. In the daytime he's a swimmer. A survivor.

'We're both survivors,' he said the first night we got together. 'Both the same. Right down to the wreckage.'

And I could see how he was right. Firemen lifted me out of a car that had been squashed down to the height of a carrycot. Lucky I was in a carrycot, then. Those child seats everyone has

now, reinforced and braced, they would have done nothing for me. They had to cut the roof open with every kind of tool devised by man, just so they could get to the baby inside, as difficult to extract as a soft nut from a shell. It took them all night, but I just lay there asleep – apparently. Maybe that’s why I don’t mind the sound of engines now, the *krrrum* of working steel. To me it can only be the sound of safety. Of arrival.

You could see it as a second birth. Metal-working midwives to bring me back into the world. When the firemen go on strike, I’m always on their side. Give them all the money there is, I say. I owe my life to them, never so soft as I was then. So in need of others to help me survive.

Tom’s the same. Although he was older when it happened to him, and swears he remembers. ‘What if?’ he said that first night (the night we got together). ‘What if I was in the other car, and no one ever told us? What if your parents’ bad driving killed my parents?’

And that made me laugh. I laughed so much I cried. Then cried and cried. It’s the only time I have cried for my parents. Ever. Safe for the first time, wrapped up in the arms of someone else. Safe and sad with someone who was just like me.

Does it seem strange? When you’re an orphan, and you don’t remember being anything but an orphan, it’s embarrassing how much sadder everyone else is about it than you. I don’t remember my parents. I was four months old. I remember nothing. Thinking it odd when my great-aunt – my chilly Marietta – occasionally would crumple if she came across a letter from my mother lying in a drawer. Or an old dress. Even the photograph on her desk could catch her off guard. Poor Marietta – if she had ever thought to put her arms round me, I would have known to put my arms round her. But that was never Marietta’s way. And she did her best. After my

extraction, she took a whole month off from the museum. It makes me smile now, imagining a woman who had studied babies in the Amazon Basin, confounded by this baby who had turned up in Highgate. In the end she gave in and hired a nurse. I suspect it was a relief for us both.

Meeting Tom – that night we got together – it was a relief too. More than that. It was a liberation. I wrapped my arms around him and discovered I could be sad. Sad and happy at the same time.

He wasn't in the other car, of course. In our case I don't think there even was another car. He was somewhere up in the north of England. Newcastle way. Different road, different time of year. Different way of surviving. He joined a scrum of male cousins and grew up with them. He found it more difficult than I ever did. Marietta never tried to be a mother. I got by on a dry, clear-eyed kind of love. If people could meet her now, they wouldn't believe how anyone could have thrived in such arid soil. But I did thrive. Perhaps it was all those years playing amongst the glass cases in a museum dedicated to mankind; you learn there are different ways of bringing up a child. Of being a child. If you look at photographs of me then, you'd see a little girl with a close, almost guarded stare. Mouth set just so. Marietta standing beside me, ramrod straight, studying the camera with exactly the same look. Two generations between us and I was growing up in her image. We might have looked as if we were frowning, but that's just because we were thinking.

Tom grew up in a proper family. But his trouble was it had already been complete for years. No one was thinking about having another child, let alone someone else's child. They were just doing the decent thing when they took him on. So he grew up on the inside, when really he was on the outside. He saw his

aunt with her own children, noted the difference – and knew exactly what he was missing. It would have been better if he had been lifted away altogether, held up for the auction they call adoption. Love would have been the highest bidder and he would have grown up – who knows – a different man. A different kind of Tom.

That first night – the night we got together – he drifted off long before I did. Already he was sound asleep, clinging to me like Arrian to his dolphin, a boy-man naked on the ocean swell. I found his arm heavy even then. But I didn't mind. I felt light. Buoyant, still smiling in the dark, I liked the way he smelt, the scent that lay in the whorls of hair at the nape of his neck. I breathed him in, believing I could have carried him for ever.

We'd only just met but already I knew. Some people are impossible to make happy. But with Tom it was simple. All he needed was love – a lot of it. And to my utter amazement, suddenly I had love to give; love that seemed to have come from nowhere, protective and tender. Unsuspected, not existing before this moment. Like mother love, I suppose. Born at the same time as the child, because of the child.

Mother love – first the child, then the love.

Ten years ago. He was nearly thirty then. I was twenty-five. It's late to find what you've been missing since the day you became orphans. It makes you careful with what you have. You don't tamper with an engine that's been running like clockwork.

We have no children. Something understood between us: a promise, a pledge to be all the family we could ever need.

When Tom wakes up, his arms fall away almost instantly. Perhaps deep down he does know, after all, about the way he sleeps.

This morning he's up before me. Standing by the window looking out over the roofs of Highgate, his back to the bed. He is tall and slender, despite the muscles smoothed along the lengths of his calves and thighs. If you saw him from behind you would take him for a boy just broken out of adolescence. He likes himself like this and takes care to stay this way. If it were the weekend, he would be getting dressed to go running. Sometimes I'll go with him, winding down to Waterlow Park, legs scissoring on the pavements tilting past Kenwood House. Slowing as we make the climb back up the hill. He doesn't stop for me when I fall behind, but at the end of it he'll have something waiting for me. A drink, an ice cream. Something.

But today is Monday and he's dressing for work. Slowly. His heart is not in the search for socks that match, or a tie with the right pattern. Since I am supposed to be asleep he's making a pretence of not waking me, but his heart isn't in that either. When he can't find what he is looking for he swears out loud.

So I open my eyes, smile at him. And he smiles back. I'm awake; he's got what he wants.

'I woke you. Sorry.'

'No, it's good. I'd have overslept otherwise. I was awake in the night. I had that dream again.'

But he doesn't really know about the dream of the little girl. Tom ploughs through the day as if there's nothing beneath him, no unseen depths. The challenge is all on the surface, he's a swimmer, not a deep-sea diver. I could dream the same dream every night and tell him about it and it would mean nothing. And why should it?

'Have you seen the tie with the clocks on it?'

I get out of bed and help him look.

By the time he's done, I am washed, dressed, breakfasted and ready. Readier than he is. Out on the pavement, he looks

down at the sun reflected in his shoe, and says, 'Who'd want to be stuck on the Tube on a day like today?'

'Catch the bus, then.'

'I'd have to have left half an hour ago.'

I take his arm and walk him to the Underground. 'So what sort of day are you expecting?'

'Guess for yourself. Joaquin's over from Portugal for the week.'

Tom edits a financial magazine. He can do it because he's a man who knows about lots of things – money markets, formatting a newspaper, commissioning writers. He knows about art and design and fashion. He knows exactly what shoes to wear and would tell me too if only I would listen. It's all reflected in the pages of what he produces: a journal that looks like the magazines waiting for you in the first-class seats of an aeroplane. It has adverts for expensive watches and executive luggage, and carries articles you might want to read even if you weren't an investment manager or pension fund holder.

Tom has come a long way from where he started. But he doesn't give himself credit. He gets uncomfortable when old traces of Geordie catch his tongue unawares, goes quiet at smart dinner parties when people start talking about their old schools. He can't see a reason to be proud of his progress, and that lack of pride, it makes him vulnerable, needing protection.

His problem today is Joaquin, the owner, who is over from Portugal and doesn't seem to know how much Tom knows. He'll take up space between the white walls of the offices and poke a long Portuguese finger into the business (which, after all, belongs to him). Tom will feel hemmed in and threatened. He will come home depressed and I will have to cheer him up. And tonight he will open a second bottle of wine, and say: 'I

don't know how much longer I can stand this.'

And I will take hold of his hand, and say, 'There's no reason for you to stand anything. Find another job, or try not working at all. We could afford it.'

We could too, for reasons we don't discuss. Reasons that have to do with Marietta and museums and a hundred years of family money.

And he will say, 'Oh but it's not just the job, Sara. It's everything. London, the pace of life. The people, the traffic. There has to be a better way. Somewhere else we could be. Nobody who can leave is staying anymore. Everyone's getting out.'

He's talking about the achievers, the high-flyers who pick up his magazine. The people who can actually afford the products in its pages. Who lately have been turning their backs on what made them rich to concentrate on the vineyard, the herds of alpaca, the small organic farm in the country. Confident that, in contrast, the world will never turn its back on them. Feature writers will come after them, to interview them over organic lunches at well-scrubbed tables, listen to them talk about life the way it should be. Yin and yang. Give and take. Balance and flow.

Lately Tom's been talking a lot about flow. I hold his hand, but say nothing.

Outside the tube station, we stop and kiss. Properly, holding on just that extra second. Anyone passing would think we were a pair of lovers not spouses. It's because we know what we have; take nothing for granted.

All the same, it's like coming awake again, a second start to the day. Tom takes his leave and I carry on walking with a kick in my heels. Almost guilty. Unlike Tom, I'm looking forward to

my day. I like my work, what there is of it.

He couldn't believe it at first, the job I did.

'So, you work in a museum...?'

'The Ravenscroft Museum of Man.'

'Ravenscroft...'. He mulled over the name. I knew he'd have heard of it, the way people mostly have heard of it – attached to some collection or work of art. Or, as in this case, an entire museum.

But it turned out he knew more than even most people.

'The Ravenscrofts – American robber barons, right? Made all their money flogging Chinamen to their deaths on the railroads, cleaned up selling arms to absolutely everyone in the First World War, made a packet while others topped themselves during the Depression...'

'They weren't all like that.'

'No? I suppose they had their eccentrics. All those families did. The ones who travelled, trolling round the world collecting things, pretending not to know where their fortune came from. Isn't that how most museums get started?' He looked at me.

'And you do...what at this museum? Are you a curator?'

'No.'

'Research? Cataloguing? Archivist?'

I shook my head each time. Then nodded, because all of those things I did – a little.

'Ravenscroft Museum of Man. Anthropology, that's what they're about there. Right?'

I nodded. It was like a game of twenty questions. That was the night we met, and this was just the first five minutes.

'So...you go off in the rainy season and live with tribes in the Amazon? Run around with men with artificially elongated penises?'

'No. Mostly I'm just an attendant, one of the people in the

corner watching you. I get to sit on a stool if I'm lucky.'

'Making sure I don't try nicking a three-hundred-year-old loincloth.'

'Exactly.' I paused. 'Marietta, my great-aunt, did all those things – the jobs you mentioned. It's her museum. She inherited it. It was a family thing. She even used to go off and live with the men with very long penises. Actually it was ears. They weighed down their ears where she went, so the lobes were elongated. She had to give that up to look after me.'

'Your aunt? Why was that?'

'My parents died when I was a baby.'

He smiled slowly. 'You know what? So did mine.'

And suddenly we were staring at each other with a new kind of interest. Studying each other like the last two remaining members of a tribe, astounded to find they are not alone.

If things had been different, if only one of us had been the orphan, the child without parents, we might have smiled our sympathy – then talked about something else. Moved on to somebody else. I wasn't Tom's type in those days, not really, being tall and thin, with hair too mousy to be brown. Serious. Slow to smile, like Marietta. Growing more like Marietta every day.

He asked me my name.

'Sara,' I told him. 'Sara Ravenscroft.'

Today I head off for the museum as I have nearly every day since I was old enough to keep Marietta company. Not for much longer, though. It's the end of an era. Marietta died two years ago and now the hundred-year lease has run out. The museum – her museum – is closing. Its contents transferred to the British Museum, to be sorted and stashed for ever amongst countless other collections of enthusiasts, wealthy

amateurs with the tendencies of magpies.

So we're packing. African fly switches tribal thrones, shrunk heads and shaman's purses – everything to go. Except for me. Proper museums, the sort that aren't inherited, don't need members of the family firm – knowledgeable about most things, but expert in none.

I doubt if there will be a Ravenscroft Room, there in the British Museum. They already have everything we have, and more.

I don't want to think about it too much, though, what comes after. Today I will be in a sea of bubble wrap and artefacts. But before that I will half skip down Highgate Hill in the sunshine, avoiding the ambulances careening into the Whittington, buy a newspaper from the man on the Holloway Road – and only then, when I'm running out of time, catch a bus. I'll find a seat on the top deck with the teenagers and look out of the window. Watch the children walking to school, small hands clutching the hands of their mothers.

Tom meanwhile will be on the Tube, avoiding the eyes of the nutters, trying to ignore the farting and the jostling. Probably he'll delve into his briefcase and bring out a book, the one he keeps quoting to me. It's by Thoreau, and is all about real life being the life lived away from the town, away from people. The happy man depends on no one, he says.

Marietta – if she were alive – would have said he is wrong. Civilisation is all about men and women learning to depend on each other. She had a whole museum to prove it.

He doesn't have to go on the Tube if he doesn't like it. Tom and I, we use the city in different ways.

Mid morning I stop packing and peel off the surgical gloves we have to wear when we handle things. Phone Tom.

'Yes?'

One word. He doesn't even know it's me he's talking to. But I can hear the edge in his voice. He's not having a good day.

'I forgot. We're going out to dinner tonight. Did you remember?'

'Charlie and Jen's? Of course I remembered.'

I open my mouth to ask about work, then close it again. He'll tell me later, blow-by-blow. The funny thing is, I've met Joaquin a few times, and I like him. For all the reasons Tom doesn't.

Perhaps *like* isn't the word I'm looking for.

Tom rings off and I put my gloves back on. I'm sitting in a puddle of all things Chinese, and the next object to hand is a pair of tiny scarlet slippers, concertinaed as if they have been in a collision. Made out of wood and bright silk, the colour has hardly faded since the day they were fashioned for the shrunken feet of a court lady two hundred years ago. Little red shoes, small as the shoes of a child.

And suddenly I'm back in my dream, watching her stand on the riverbank. Little red shoes poised to take her over the edge.

Have to blink it away. Fold the shoes up in bubble wrap and put them out of sight.

Jen meets us at the door, baby on her hip.

'Come in. Charlie's upstairs with Pig and I'm just about to put this one down. Go and do what you usually do.'

So we do what we usually do and make our way into their kitchen that looks as if it's been picked up and shaken like a snow globe, with nothing fallen where it should have. There are saucepans on the floor and gumboots on the table. The cat is eating the remains of a child's dinner up on the kitchen counter.

Tom looks repelled. I shoo it off while he opens one of our

own bottles and finds glasses. I take two and make my way upstairs to find Jen who is in their bathroom changing the nappy on the Duke (real name Andrew). I hand her the glass and she glugs it down in one.

‘Lovely,’ she says and passes it back to me, gets on with wiping her child’s backside. Her hand has left a smear of something on the glass and I put it down quickly.

‘It’s a good thing Tom didn’t see you knock it back like that. It’s vintage something or other. It came all the way from Joaquin’s vineyard.’

‘Oh, Charlie will appreciate it. Poor thing – all he ever gets is plonk. Me, I don’t care.’

‘Is there anything I can do?’

‘No – unless you feel like cooking supper, cleaning up the kitchen, ironing a shirt for Charlie...the usual.’ She looks up from what she’s doing and smiles. ‘By the way, Sara, you look lovely tonight. Really lovely.’

Jen herself is not looking particularly lovely tonight. Her hair is still wet and she’s wearing the same clothes she wore when she was pregnant. She hasn’t managed to get into her old ones yet. But she pays me the compliment gravely and seriously, without a hint of bitterness – or comparison, even. It’s part of a secret language she’s developed just for me, as if it’s something I need to hear. We both know what she’s saying: I may not have a baby, but I do have a waist. Small consolation, for which read: no consolation at all.

Because this is how Jen sees me: Sara who grew up without parents and who now will grow old without children. Nothing before me and nothing to come after me. A full stop stamped in Time. Human punctuation.

Often I catch her – friend since we were eleven – looking at me over the heads of her babies with eyes gone soft with pity.

She thinks I'm grieving. It's as if we have gone back in time, to when we were children and she couldn't imagine a fate worse than losing one's parents. Expecting me to cry at any moment for people I never knew.

It's happening again. Jen thinks I am grieving now – not for parents this time, but children I also have never known. I've tried telling her she's wrong, but she just smiles, convinced I'm being brave, that it's nothing to do with choice. She's a daughter who has grown into a mother. She can't think there's any other way to be. It's not her fault. I'm just not like her, that's all.

Besides, if I had a child, who would look after it if anything happened to Tom and me? There would be no Marietta, no proper family, no matter how grudging. Just care homes and orphanages and social workers. I put that to her once, exasperated. Finished up by saying:

'Would you take on our children then, if something happened to us?'

She flushed and said lightly, 'Oh but Sara, nothing would happen.'

But she was wrong, she knew that. Things do happen. And no one knows it as well as us, Tom and me. We know how things go wrong. And how, sometimes, things go right.

Lucky to have found each other. That's what Jen can't understand. But still she watches me, eyes soft, as if seeing something I can't even see myself.

Tom and Charlie are working their way through the wine. Charlie, an anaesthetist, isn't on call tonight so he can afford to. And Tom – well Tom is exactly the way I knew he would be when Joaquin's in town.

'So what does Joaquin actually do, Tom?' This is Jen asking.

‘I mean, does he make you take back decisions? Does he fire people without asking you?’

‘I’d like to see him try.’

‘So...what? Does he sit at your desk? Play with your executive toys? Finger the secretaries?’

‘We don’t have secretaries. We’re a paperless office.’

‘I know the problem.’ This is Charlie. ‘It’s to do with authority. If he’s there, it means Tom isn’t the boss any more. Joaquin, just by walking into the building, is showing who’s in charge. Suddenly there’s a lid on everything. Doesn’t matter if he never opens his mouth. He’s there, and it changes everything.’

Tom winces. Which means Charlie has hit the spot.

‘You know...’ Tom says. And I do know. I know exactly what’s coming next. ‘I don’t know how much more I can stand.’

Charlie and Jen groan. They’ve heard it too. Countless times.

‘Seriously. I want a house and a few acres of land. Have a stream, make our own power. Grow enough vegetables to feed ourselves...’

‘...This from the man who apparently doesn’t like vegetables.’ Jen points to the mound left on his plate. She’s overcooked them and Tom is fastidious that way.

I laugh, but Tom doesn’t. He says, ‘Well look at us. Look at the noise, the pollution. And traffic, and crime. Look at the way we live.’

‘I like the way we live.’ I say it quietly. Otherwise it sounds as if I’m picking an argument. Which I’m not.

It doesn’t matter because Tom hasn’t heard me anyway. He says, ‘Ask Sara, she’ll tell you the same. She can’t even drive for a pint of milk without someone getting road rage.’

But that's not true. I drive in London the same way I swim in our local pool: giving way to the men with pumping arms and the women whose heads plunge forward as if searching for children lost beneath the waves. Do anything else and they will plough right into you, jerk you through the water like the victim of a shark attack. Leave you bobbing in eddies of disturbed chlorine. Better to let them go, tread water, watch the patterns of the tiles moving peaceably fifteen feet below. Don't even try to compete. That's how I drive in London.

Except I scarcely ever drive. And definitely not for milk, not when I only have to step out of our front door and into Mr Georghiu's shop, and take it off the shelf. And anything else I need.

'Well personally,' says Jen, 'I don't see how you could ever want to leave. How many couples do you know have a three-storey house on the top of Highgate Hill? And the wherewithal to live in it?'

Tom looks blank suddenly. When his parents died there was nothing left to cushion their infant son. They were young, had lived in a council flat and every penny of the insurance policy was used by his aunt to keep him in shoes. But with me it was different. Probably the car my parents drove to destruction was worth more than the house Tom grew up in, which is a clue in itself. Then there was Marietta. Marietta who loved me in her dry, clear-eyed way. And she left everything to me, including the house I grew up in.

It's as if every time people disappear they give me money. I'd rather have Marietta still alive.

But it's something Tom prefers not to think about. It makes him uncomfortable. And it casts an uncomfortable silence around us now. Maybe Jen was being faintly malicious, taking a small poke at Tom who thinks life is hard in his white-

walled office and his Highgate house. A reminder that others are working all the hours at a hospital, paying a mortgage that would buy a small castle in Scotland while their wives juggle two children and bills and ...

From upstairs comes the sound of crying. The Duke has woken up, is summoning her with all the might in his lungs. Straight away Jen is on her feet.

‘Sorry,’ she says, but she’s not. She loves that sound.

But she has upset Tom. He doesn’t say as much, but it’s there later in our bedroom, as he watches me undress, considering what he sees. Comparing and contrasting.

‘It’s really nice,’ he says finally. ‘The way you haven’t let yourself go. You’re as skinny as the day I met you. Not like some.’ He means Jen.

‘It’s nothing to do with not letting myself go. Skinny is how we are in our family. Remember Marietta. She was like a stick.’

‘You’re not a stick.’ He pulls at the covers so I can climb in beside him. For a moment he lies stroking my breast, then he laughs out loud.

‘What?’

‘I’m just feeling sorry for poor old Charlie. One thing you can guarantee he’s not doing is lying with a woman in his arms. You know what he told me? If the younger kid... what do they call him? The Bloody Red Baron...?’

‘The Duke.’

‘If the Duke squawks in the night, Charlie’s kicked out of the double bed and into the spare room. Jen makes sure the baby is happy if no one else. Ugly bugger he is too. Built like a panzer tank, that one. Fuck that – not being allowed in your own bed with your own wife. God, Sara! Imagine being like them.’

He laughs and stretches. ‘She’s going to carry on, isn’t she?’

Having kid after kid. Pushing them out as fast as Charlie can push one in.'

'No. She likes what she's got. This is as far as it goes for her. Pig and the Duke – they're all she needs and all she wants. She doesn't want any more children.'

He rolls his eyes, but then he's quiet and it's over, his one small act of revenge. He likes Jen and now that he's commented on her size and her devotion and the baby's looks, he'll let it lie. Won't hold it against her.

But I think he's wrong about Charlie feeling mistreated about the spare room – or anything. When he waved us off he was drunk and slightly ruffled, with his shirt hanging out. He had his arm around Jen, pulling her in close. Big grin on his face.

We make love and drift off to sleep. Soon Tom, who ploughs through his day, telling people what to think, telling people what I think, will cling to me again. Like that man drowning, clutching at the thing that saves him. On the edge of sleep myself, I'm anxious now. Wondering if she will be back, the little girl. If again I'll have to watch her, helpless, knowing what must happen next.

But it's all right. Instead I sink into a dream of water. I am swimming in our local pool. This time I have solved the problem of people pumping and plunging in the race to the shallow end. I am down here instead, beneath them. Swimming deep underwater where it's clear and blue and empty. I can swoop and turn somersaults, don't even have to breathe. Above me their legs and arms are waving and kicking like people struggling not to drown.

Down here it's peaceful. A much better place to be.

Chapter Two

‘Wake up, Sara.’

Tom is leaning over me in the bed. He looks excited, younger even than he does normally. Outside, morning has barely lightened the windows. It’s Saturday. Is he going running this early?

‘Rise and shine, I’ve got an idea.’ He kisses my shoulder then leaps out of bed. Stares down at me expectantly. Clearly part of the idea is that I jump out of bed too.

‘But it’s only six o’ clock...’

‘Never mind that, come on.’ He pulls the duvet off me and flings it on the floor. Too determined just to be playful.

Bewildered, I swing my legs over the side.

‘What do you think of a weekend away? Find a hotel, walk, look for some good pubs. Have some time to ourselves.’

‘I don’t know. Where?’

‘South. Follow the sun. Devon, Cornwall. Land of the cream tea.’

‘It’s already Saturday. We’ll only manage a night, then we’ll have to drive all the way back.’

‘That’s why we’ve got to head off now. But what I’m thinking is that I take Monday off. Maybe Tuesday. Why not bloody Wednesday while we’re at it.’ The excited look fades. ‘Look, I’m serious. I can’t handle it, Sara, not when Joaquin