



A Match to Remember

Helen Hawkins

Chapter One

‘Where could it have possibly gone?’ Lizzie flung open the bottom-most of three drawers and pulled everything out. Among the pile now on the carpet was a selection of old clothes, unworn and unfolded; two pairs of skiing gloves, despite having never gone skiing; an unopened box of AA batteries; and her birth certificate hidden amongst a couple of Sky bills and her rental agreement. At least her birth certificate was in a folder. She could almost hear her older sister, Kirsty, scolding her for not having important things like her rental agreement and birth certificate alphabetised in a plastic wallet somewhere safe.

She was certain she’d taken her DBS check out and left it on the counter in the kitchen, ready for the big day. But it had since disappeared and she could only surmise that it had sprouted wings and flown away. Things had a habit of doing that in this flat.

It wasn’t unusual for Lizzie to be awake in the early hours. She hadn’t slept properly in years. But last night, sleep had

evaded her. Entirely. It was her first day as a trainee teacher at Cranswell Primary and she was buzzing with excitement. And now, also panic.

She grumbled under her breath and kicked the drawer shut, before padding through to the kitchen and pushing down the plunger on the cafetière; the rich, fresh aroma of coffee was welcome after her failed search. After pouring herself a mug, she cracked open the window in the living room, the day already warm, and sat with her feet up on the sill, looking out over the town. A few deep breaths would usually help. The view looked out onto the busy shopping street below, but at this hour, it was just the delivery man who brought great big bags of flour to the bakery each morning. He whistled a jolly tune. Lizzie took another deep breath and brushed back some of her frizzy hair, heated from the stress and exertion.

A movement from the door made her jump and she turned, the sudden motion spilling coffee onto her pyjama shorts.

‘Why are you creeping up on me?’ Lizzie said, standing up to brush the hot coffee from her legs.

‘How long have you been awake?’ Tom asked.

‘A while.’ She refilled her mug and passed a second to Tom.

‘Thanks.’ He took a sip and a deep breath. ‘We shouldn’t have stayed up that late on a school night.’

Lizzie shook her head. ‘Especially not on the first school night.’ She rubbed a hand over her face, conscious that she probably looked hideous. She could only imagine the size of the bags under her eyes.

Tom drew a circle in the air towards Lizzie’s face of unremoved make-up and crazy hair. ‘This does not look like the face of a trainee teacher about to embark on the first day of the rest of her life.’

‘No, Tom, it does not. This is the face of someone who stayed up way too late and was sabotaged by her flatmate, who didn’t think to put a stop to the *Sex and the City* marathon.’ She crawled onto the sofa and pulled a blanket around her.

Tom put up his hands in defence. ‘You are a thirty-year-old woman, Miss Morris. You need to learn to take care of yourself, which includes choosing a reasonable bedtime.’

‘But while I’m learning to take care of myself, you need to help me,’ she whined, pulling the blanket up further.

Tom laughed.

‘What time is it?’ She propped herself up and downed the last of her coffee.

‘Seven-fifteen,’ Tom said, holding up and pointing at the clock from the sideboard.

‘Oh God, I need to get showered and dressed!’ Lizzie jumped off the sofa and snapped into action. ‘Like now. I’m going to be late for my first day. What am I going to wear? And where is my DBS check? I swear I left it here with my lunchbox and bag.’

‘How have you not thought about what to wear yet?’ Tom asked, incredulous and oblivious to the more serious issue of the lost DBS check.

Lizzie shrugged.

‘I’m telling you now Lizzie Morris, you will get nowhere as a teacher unless you get yourself a little more organised – lesson number one from a teaching assistant who’s seen it all. Have a shower and I’ll pick out a couple of options for you for when you’ve finished. Your DBS is on the side of the bath, by the way.’

Lizzie opened her mouth to ask why and then decided not to bother. She didn’t care how it had got there; she just cared

that she'd found it. She reached up and kissed Tom on the cheek as she passed him.

'Love you!'

Stepping into the shower, Lizzie could feel herself frowning. She'd been so prepared for today. She knew where she was going and how long it would take her to get there; her lunch was prepared and in the fridge ready to go – and had been carefully thought out to ensure it was easy to eat in public and wouldn't stink out the staffroom. She had visited WHSmith to get herself a new pencil case, and stationery for every possible stationery requirement. Never in the history of readiness had anyone been so ready for their first day. And yet she'd not slept – worrying again – and her DBS check had somehow made its way into the bathroom. She shook her head, moving it onto the shelf before turning the shower on.

Letting the water from the shower run down her hair and back, she closed her eyes and took some deep breaths. Everything would be fine, she thought. She withheld the nervous urge to throw up that was beginning to wash over her in stronger and stronger waves.

When she returned to her bedroom, she saw Tom had hung two outfits up on her wardrobe, including accessories, which hung down from the coat hangers. On the floor, he'd laid out some shoe options for her. On top of that, he'd replenished her mug of coffee.

Where had she got so lucky with a friend like Tom? Bizarrely, they'd not met until they were both at university, but it hadn't taken them long to realise that they'd both grown up in this same sleepy little market town, just at opposite ends of the high street. And now they'd met in the middle, sharing a flat above the bakery near the village green.

Lizzie blow-dried her unruly hair and straightened it in front of the mirror. The June sun, having already risen for the day, reflected off her fiery red locks, emblazoning the colour even more than normal. It was going to be another scorching day. By the time she'd added a thin layer of make-up and pulled her long hair up into a ponytail, she was beginning to look half human again, if a little bedraggled by the heat.

Tom's outfit choices were perfect, as always. His 'leaving the rest of her wardrobe tidy' was not. Lizzie stuffed a couple of pairs of shoes back into the wardrobe and slid the sleeve of a corduroy blazer and the skirt of her bright red Jessica Rabbit dress back through the crack in the door. Not that she'd wear either of those items of clothing again – one was hideously out of fashion and always had been, and the other was only appropriate for a twenty-year-old – and a skinny one at that.

Lizzie's phone buzzed and she removed herself from the wardrobe to see who had texted her. It was from Kirsty:

Hey! Hope today goes well! Can't wait to hear all about it at practice later! xxx

Lizzie smiled. Her sister's jolly text messages were so unlike her real-life Eeyore demeanour. In reality, Kirsty was nearly a decade older and far more serious than Lizzie was. After their parents died, Kirsty had become something of a mother hen to her.

She padded over to her dressing table and pushed around the necklaces and bracelets that clung together like spaghetti.

'How are you getting on?' Tom asked, his head popping round the door.

'Better, but your regular check-ins are starting to stress me out!' Lizzie said, placing a long silver necklace over her head

and pulling on a thin-knit oversized cardigan. ‘Do I look like a teacher?’ She held out her arms and gave him a spin.

‘You look great. Are you ready to go? If we leave now, we can still walk instead of driving,’ he said, looking at his watch.

Lizzie nodded. ‘I just need to find Mum’s ring.’ She rifled again in the chaos that was her dressing table and pulled out the ring – silver with two starfish at either end of the loop of metal that spiralled around her finger – memories of a holiday to the Isle of Wight as a child growing only slightly less vivid than the occasion itself. She slipped it on and took a deep breath, holding her finger and the ring with her other hand. ‘I promised I’d get here,’ she said quietly, remembering her determination to become a teacher and how proud her parents would have been to see her walking over the school threshold as a trainee.

‘Lizzie!’ Tom’s voice brought Lizzie back to the present, and she took a final breath in the hope it would remove her urge to cry.

‘Coming!’ she said. Lizzie took one final look in the mirror and left her bedroom.

Lizzie and Tom lived about a fifteen-minute drive away from the school, but to walk it would only take forty-five minutes, with less traffic and fewer roadworks. Despite her excitement, Lizzie was keen to put off arriving for as long as possible. Nerves were creeping in and the butterflies in her stomach were having a rave.

Grabbing her ready-made, aroma-free lunch from the fridge and putting it into her new school bag, Lizzie set off with Tom as if she were fifteen again and it was the 1st of September. In reality, it was the 1st of June and today was the first day of the

rest of her life – the start of her dreams finally coming true. Thanks to Tom's role as a teaching assistant at Cranswell Primary School (and her own unemployed status), she'd managed to bag half a term's paid work experience before her official placement started after the summer. Her mum and dad would have been so proud and Lizzie couldn't wait to get started.