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**Opening Extract from...**

# **A Secret Garden**

Written by Katie Fforde

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*Katie  
Florde*

A  
Secret  
Garden



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To women who garden, everywhere.

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# Chapter One



Philly pulled at the gaffer tape with her teeth, failed to tear it and groaned. 'Hand me those secateurs, Grand,' she said. Wind found its way up the sleeves of her coat, far colder than wind in April ought to be, in Philly's opinion. If it weren't for the primroses in the hedgerows and the trays of forced bulbs in her greenhouse, it could have been February.

Her grandfather shook his head. 'You need scissors, or a knife. Here.' He took out the Swiss Army knife he was never without and cut the tape.

Philly applied it to the rip in the polytunnel and then looked carefully for more potential holes. 'If we get the weather that's forecast, I need to be sure the wind can't get in.'

'Child dear!' said her grandfather. 'A new polytunnel is what you need. Why won't you let me buy you one?'

Philly, satisfied the tunnel was as windproof as it

could be, handed him back his knife. 'Grand? Do we have to have this conversation every day? Wouldn't once a week be enough?'

'C'mon now. There's a storm brewing that might tear this old thing down. What would happen to your precious salvias then?'

Philly nodded. 'They might all be blown to bits, I realise that. But it's too late for a new polytunnel now.' She smiled at him, knowing he couldn't win this argument.

'But it's not too late for the next gale. You know they say "April is the cruellest month". It could quite easily produce a hurricane for you.' He was as stubborn as she was.

She put her hand on his arm. 'Grand, dear, I owe you enough already and I don't want to get into more debt with you. I'll make do with this tunnel until I make enough money for a new one.'

Her grandfather tutted but didn't argue any more. He wasn't giving up the battle, just retrenching. 'Come away in and have some tea. There's cake.'

Philly brightened. 'So what's wrong with it? Did you leave the walnuts out of a coffee and walnut?'

'It's a trifle overbaked,' he said. 'Or burnt as we said in the olden days.'

Philly was surprised. 'What, actual burnt, burnt?'

'Indeed no! But it's not of merchantable quality.'

Philly laughed. 'That's OK then. But if you



wouldn't mind hanging on, I need to do my posies and check which bulbs are advanced enough for me to bring to the stall. It won't take long. I've all my material picked and ready. Then it'll be time for the phone call. You remember they're all off to a party on Sunday so they brought it forward? Could we have tea after that?'

'Of course we could. I'll put the potatoes in for supper. The cake can be pudding.'

'Perfect!' She kissed his cheek and took his arm as they set off. Philly headed for one of the outbuildings, her grandfather for the house. She was rather dreading the phone call. She had nothing new to tell her parents, nothing that would make them stop worrying, and therefore nagging for her to come home to Ireland, even if that meant leaving her grandfather here in England.

She had no desire to abandon the adventure she and her grandfather had set out on, three years ago, when her grandfather had happened to see a small-holding online and something about it appealed to him although he'd been after a house with a few garages. She had gone with him to see it. When she'd seen it, she'd fallen in love with it too. It had a few acres, lots of outbuildings and even a couple of old polytunnels. It was perfect for her to grow plants in and see if her life-long dream to be a plantswoman would withstand real-life experience.

The house was a tumbledown money pit, no doubt

about it, but Philly and her grandfather didn't mind living in the big old farmhouse kitchen and shutting off other rooms in winter. And what had completely sold it to her grandfather was the mouldering old Alvis in one of the garages. He would have gone to England all on his own, desperately needing a new project and to get away from his family, to distract him from loneliness after his wife died – but when Philly, who had just gone to keep him company at the viewing, had said she wanted to come too, it had all seemed too perfect not to pursue.

How such a property had stayed out of the hands of developers was a great big hunk of Irish luck. It had an agricultural covenant on it that meant no one could turn the outbuildings into dwellings, even holiday lets. The seller had made sure his property wouldn't get into what he felt were the wrong hands.

Also, when Philly and her grandfather had come to see it, the elderly seller had taken a shine to them. He invited them into his mouldering house, gave them tea out of stained mugs and insisted they sat down. As there was no alternative they sank into a sofa that had the consistency of a bog. While they were unable to move without assistance, he grilled them about their plans. When they admitted that they were both running away from a well-meaning but overbearing and conventional family, he decided theirs was the offer he'd accept. Even if it wasn't

the highest. (He told them this at the time.) He was going to take the money for the property and end his days on a narrow boat.

He had asked if they wouldn't gentrify the house too much and they had agreed. They had no trouble consenting to this although there was nothing legally binding – just no chance of there being any spare money for anything beyond keeping out the worst of the weather.

Now, three years later, things weren't much different. But in spite of the hard work and the discomfort ('utter squalor', as Philly's horrified mother described it) they both still had their dreams intact.

It didn't take Philly long to make twenty or so posies, all in makeshift containers: jam jars, tin cans or yoghurt pots. The containers, although rustic, had had a bit of a facelift – a lick of paint or a good scrub – something to make them look fresh and not as if they'd been salvaged from a huge pile of rubbish found at the house. (Which was where they had all come from.) A bit of oasis, some greenery (she loved the fresh acidity of new spring foliage), several different tulips, dark velvet polyanthus, a few sprigs of blossom and she had informal arrangements that people loved. Then she gathered several pots of growing bulbs, scillas, white and blue grape hyacinths and some late miniature daffodils, and

she had something that would grace anyone's table. Her offerings were very popular with people headed for dinner parties. Philly also bunched together larger sprays of hedgerow plants and small trees that were beloved of flower arrangers. As Philly was sometimes roped in to do the flowers in church, she knew how hard it was to find enough suitable greenery if you had a tidy garden and so she provided it. This all supplemented the containers of bulbs that she sold officially but which, she reflected now, weren't quite such good earners. The posies and greenery bunches represented 100 per cent profit.

When she'd created enough to make her stall look attractive and make an extra fifty pounds or so, she went back to the house, looking forward to warming up. Then she'd talk to her mother. Dead on six o'clock, the phone rang.

'Well, darling, how are you?' said Marion Doyle, unable as ever to conceal her anxiety about her youngest child.

'I'm fine, Ma, really. How are the boys?' Philly had two older brothers who fitted in better with what Marion considered proper.

'They're fine. Working hard. Now tell me about you.'

Philly always felt a bit put on the spot when her mother asked this. 'Well, I've got lots of things to sell at tomorrow's market. And now it's spring,

there'll be loads of tourists and second-homers wanting to brighten up their gardens.'

'And your grandfather? Is he still – you know – baking?' In Philly's mother's world, men didn't bake.

'He is – he's brilliant at it. You should be proud of him.'

'It's not that I'm not proud, it's just I find it a bit odd. I blame you, Philomena. You introduced him to that programme.'

Philly laughed, refusing to be apologetic. 'I admit I never thought Grand would take up baking just because of *Bake Off* but he's brilliant at it! People depend on him being at the stall on Saturday mornings. He even takes commissions,' she added proudly.

Her mother sighed. 'Well, I suppose it beats messing around with that old car, but it's hardly a manly activity, is it?'

'It's perfectly manly,' said Philly, knowing her mother would never accept this. 'And it is better for him in winter, anyway. It's far warmer in the kitchen.'

'But the kitchen, darling! Is it even hygienic, baking in there?'

'Ma, you haven't been over to visit us since that first time. You haven't seen all we've done to the kitchen to bring it up to professional standards of hygiene.'

Marion didn't comment. Philly could tell she was holding herself back from saying, yet again, that however much they might have done to the kitchen, the house was still unfit to live in, especially for a man of Seamus's age. Knowing this would create bad feeling she said instead, 'Well now, have you got a boyfriend yet?'

Although Philly was relieved that her mother wasn't telling her yet again that her grandfather shouldn't live in such a cold house, she wasn't awfully pleased with this topic of conversation. 'No, Ma! I didn't have one last week either!'

Her mother sighed. 'But are you even meeting any young men who might become boyfriends, stuck out there in the middle of nowhere?' Marion didn't think much to the very pleasant little town that was less than three miles away from the smallholding.

'Not at the moment.' Here was where Philly and her mother were in agreement. Meeting a few boys of her own age would be nice. One even. There was a boy who worked on the cheese counter opposite them when they did the market, but she felt so shy if they needed cheese she managed to always get her grandfather to buy it. She wasn't going to admit this to her mother though. 'I'm thinking of asking the pub if they need any bar staff,' she went on. 'That would be a good way to meet young people.'

Marion tsked but didn't comment. She had another little arrow to fling at Philly before she

commented on what she thought about her daughter working in a pub. She didn't really approve that Philly worked as a waitress from time to time, to a very upmarket caterer. 'Well, don't forget there's a lovely boy waiting for you here.'

'Ma, he's not waiting for me. He's got a lovely girlfriend.' This boy was sweet and had been a great childhood sweetheart but he wasn't much of a one for adventure and risk and had a good safe job in his parents' stationery business.

'He'd leave her for you if you came home.'

'Well, what sort of a boyfriend would that make him? Anyway, you and the da OK?'

'We're fine. Just worrying about you two tearaways.'

Philly laughed. 'Well, there's no need. And you can hardly describe us as tearaways. Grand is a respectable man in his seventies and I'm over the age of consent.'

'You're twenty-three! That's hardly the most responsible age.'

'How old were you when you and Da got married?' As she knew the answer to this Philly felt she'd scored the winning goal.

'OK, so I was only nineteen but I was a very mature nineteen and you were only twenty when—'

'We're going to be all right, Ma,' said Philly, interrupting. 'I know we are. I'll make a go of my plants and Grand is happy. What more can you ask for?'

‘For you both to be back home in Ireland! But I know that’s a vain hope.’ Marion sighed. ‘I’m glad you’re both happy. And don’t leave it too long before coming to see us again.’

The market the following day was even more hectic than usual. It took over the centre of the town once a week, in front of the old, picturesque buildings that included an ancient abbey, used as the parish church, which was almost as big as a cathedral. Currently outside it was a despondent thermometer displaying how much more money they needed to raise in order to repair parts of building but it was still beautiful.

Now spring was here – according to the calendar if not the weather currently – holiday-home owners, who had stayed in London over the winter, were beginning to come down to their little places in the country and wanted to beautify them. The market was also somewhere they could bring visiting friends and as you could buy almost everything you needed for a weekend’s entertaining in an enjoyably green and environmentally sound way, it was bustling. Having a second home was more acceptable if you supported local businesses, Philly assumed was their thinking. As she and her grandfather benefited she had no complaints. They were busy almost to the end. The boy with the floppy hair whom she liked was on the cheese stall. They were doing a roaring trade too.



They were just about to pack up when a tall, attractive, middle-aged woman with dark red hair cut stylishly in a wavy bob came over.

‘Caught you!’ she said. ‘I am desperate for cake. And posies.’

‘Hello, Lorna,’ said Philly. ‘I’ll wrap the posies for you.’

Lorna rummaged in her purse. ‘How much for them?’

‘I’m giving them to you,’ said Philly firmly, ‘if I can have the jars back. The flowers cost nothing, you know that, and as my best customer for the nursery, you get them free.’

‘Oh,’ said Lorna. ‘I feel I shouldn’t have asked now.’

‘Of course you should. Now, Grand, how much are you going to charge Lorna for the cake?’

‘Is a fiver too much?’ he asked.

‘A fiver is an absolute steal, but I’ll take it,’ said Lorna.

‘If you don’t mind my saying so, you don’t look to be the sort of woman who eats a lot of cake,’ he said, putting it in a bag.

‘I do! Well, I have a bit now and again. The rest I cut into slices and freeze. Then when I want a gorgeous pudding I put it in the microwave, heat it up and then serve with ice cream. It’s delicious.’

‘It does sound good,’ said Philly. ‘We must try that, Grand.’

‘Well, in exchange for a recipe, you must tell me why you call your grandfather “Grand”. It’s not in the normal range of grandfather names and I’ve wanted to know for ages but never dared ask.’

‘It’s short for Grandiloquent,’ said Philly after a short pause.

‘I never cared for any of those “Grandpa” sort of names,’ said Seamus. ‘I came across “grandiloquent” and thought it was a fine sort of a word. I suggested the little ones call me it, but it only stuck with Philly.’

‘My mother encouraged it,’ Philly explained. ‘She said that Grand was pretty much a delinquent in many ways, although we do know it’s not the same word really.’

Lorna laughed. ‘Well, thank you for that. And how are my salvias coming along?’

‘Fine, I think. And will you be wanting more tubs of delphiniums this year?’

‘Oh, I should think so. They were beautiful last year, really made an impression. I’ll be sending you a list of things I need soon. I know I should have done it before but you know how things go.’

‘It’s a shame more people don’t get to see your garden,’ said Philly.

‘It’s not my garden, thank God,’ said Lorna, ‘but you’re right, it should be seen more. Perhaps when it’s a little further along in its restoration we’ll think about opening it. It is still very early days.’

When Lorna had taken her cake and her posies and moved away, Seamus said, 'That is a fine figure of a woman.'

'She is,' Philly agreed. 'But she's a bit young for you.'

'Indeed,' said her grandfather.

Philly carried on packing up the stall. Maybe, instead of asking her about her love life every week, her mother should have been considering that of her father-in-law.

## Chapter Two



The following Monday morning, Lorna's boss handed her a cup of tea and then sat down on the step next to her. In front of them was a bumpy bit of turf that would one day (Lorna fervently hoped) be a fine lawn. Behind them were the tall columns of a graceful Palladian frontage. By mansion standards, Burthen House was on the small side, but by those of any normal home, it was enormous. Built of the honey-coloured stone common in the area, it needed a bit of work to make it truly elegant but Lorna liked its rather decayed beauty. One day, she knew, it would be fully restored but she preferred it now, really.

'So,' Lorna asked. 'How did Friday night's date go?'

Peter, lord of all he surveyed and the house, all of which was currently under restoration, sighed. 'Well, actually—' He stopped, gulped and said, 'It was amazing.'

Lorna's heart fluttered a little. 'Oh?' Peter was an optimistic online dater, pursuing women at least two decades younger than his fifty-seven years. But because he still had a lot of good hair and teeth, not to mention a stately home, he had plenty to choose from. Most of his dates were disastrous, causing him and Lorna to laugh a lot when he told her about them later. So far, none of them had caused him to gulp. And while this went on, Lorna's dreams were still intact.

He nodded. 'Yes. Apart from being absolutely gorgeous, she was really intelligent, asked all the right questions.' He sipped his coffee and then fumbled in his pocket for a packet of biscuits. He handed them to Lorna.

Lorna took one. She liked it when his dates had gone badly; she was waiting patiently for him to realise that he'd do much better with a woman his own age, i.e. her. They'd met as children, spent most of their lives apart, but here they both were, single, in the same location and yet not an item. 'So go on,' she said. 'She didn't just want to know about the size of your estate? In other words, check out if you were really rich or just bigging yourself up on the website?'

'You're cynical, you know that, Lorna?'

'It's how I stay healthy,' she said and stretched out her leg in front of her. There were perfectly good benches they could have sat on but somehow they

always sat on the steps of Burthen House, as if they were still children.

‘Well, you’d be pleased!’ Peter went on. ‘She wanted to hear about the garden and not just about old masters and stuccoed ceilings.’

‘That is a good sign. A woman with the right priorities.’

‘I told her you were restoring this for me and she wanted to know all about your plans.’

‘And you could tell her all about them, could you?’ Lorna smiled up at him, knowing full well that his interest in the garden was very superficial. He very much liked the idea of living in a stately home but wasn’t all that interested in the practicalities.

‘I just told her what I knew,’ he said, slightly on the defensive. ‘That you’d been restoring them for a couple of years and eventually hoped to get them back to how they had been.’

‘“Eventually” is about the right timescale,’ said Lorna. ‘I need more help in the gardens if we’re really going to make a difference.’ She realised she was talking about the garden to stop him telling her about his wonderful date.

But Peter wasn’t cooperating. ‘Go on then. You have my permission to take on more staff, but let me tell you more about Kirstie.’

Lorna decided she had to be content with the thought of extra staff. If Peter hadn’t noticed she

was the perfect wife for him by now, he probably never would. 'So, what makes her better than the other young lovelies you've been out with?'

'She has a brain. She's a freelance events organiser. She'd heard of the Beatles, laughed at my jokes, was generally – well, brilliant. And so pretty.'

Lorna smiled to hide her sigh. 'I can't wait to meet her.'

She'd felt sarcastic when she said it but he didn't pick it up. 'Well, isn't that perfect? You are going to meet her.'

'Am I? When?'

'As soon as I can arrange it. I'm going to have a dinner party, invite Mother, too.' He frowned ever so slightly, his brows drawing together above his aristocratic nose. 'I think she should meet Mother sooner rather than later or it'll be difficult.'

'Would it?'

He flapped his hand. 'Of course it would! You know what she's like. A horrendous snob and can be quite spiky with people she doesn't like.'

Lorna did know what she was like. Peter's mother, Lady Anthea Leonard-Stanley, was a friend of hers. Anthea and Lorna's mother had been great friends and Lorna had always got on with her too. It was through Anthea that Lorna had got the job of garden designer and restorer (and, mostly, weeder and digger) for Burthen House. She was very kind-hearted but didn't suffer fools. Lorna didn't think

she was always a snob but could be snippy about her son's unsuitable girlfriends.

'But you'd invite other people? It wouldn't just be you and Kirstie, and me and Anthea?' The thought was horrifying.

It obviously horrified Peter too. 'Good God, no! We're going to invite several people. Kirstie knows someone who can cater it. Although we might need to find someone who could help serve.'

Lorna frowned. 'Peter? You've been on one date and you're already saying "we" and giving a dinner party together. Aren't you rushing things a bit?'

He looked at Lorna and Lorna looked back, wishing she didn't find him so attractive. She'd had a crush on him when she was seven and although most of the intervening years had been spent apart, both with spouses for at least some of the time, she still felt the same.

He looked distracted. 'Lorna, after our date was over and I'd seen her home safely, I rang her, just to say goodnight and – well, we talked almost all night.'

Lorna's fluttering heart descended to her Hunter wellies and stayed there. This was serious. She could remember those times when you first meet and don't want to stop talking.

'And then we spent the whole weekend together. Reg drove her home for me on Sunday night.'



Reg was Peter's driver. 'I see. You're in love then.' She tried to sound upbeat and felt she'd managed quite well.

'Yes!' He looked at her properly for the first time that day. 'You are pleased for me, aren't you?'

Lorna took a sip of coffee to give herself an extra moment to compose herself. 'If she's really right for you, and you both really love each other in a way that will last forever, then of course I'm happy for you. How could I be otherwise?'

'I'm so glad, because I sometimes wondered – you know—' He stopped.

As Lorna knew him so well she knew perfectly well what was in his mind: did she have romantic feelings for him? Well, she had to put that idea out of his head, especially because it was true.

She laughed, praying it sounded amused and not desperately embarrassed. 'Peter! I admit I did quite fancy you when I was seven but that was a long time ago.'

'So you're really, really happy for me?'

'Of course!' And in time she would be. One of the things about loving people was that you did, on the whole, want the best for them.

'It's just I know my mother always wanted us to get together and she'll never forgive me if I've broken your heart.'

This time her laugh was a little less strained. She had always wondered if Anthea knew how she felt

about Peter. 'Would you like me to go and see her and assure her you haven't?'

'Would you? I'd be so grateful. It's going to be hard enough getting her on side without her thinking that Kirstie has cut you out in some way.'

'I can see that.' She hesitated. 'Have you a date for this dinner party?' She wanted to ask if they'd been too busy exchanging life histories and love-making to get down to the practicalities but held back. Nothing she said must even hint that he'd been right about her feelings.

'We thought maybe Saturday week? Are you free?'

Lorna got out her phone and checked her diary although she knew perfectly well she was free. 'Seems to be OK.'

'And you can find someone to wait at table?'

'Have you thought of taking on a personal assistant? You can afford it and it would make your life – and mine too, come to that – so much easier.'

He blinked. 'Why employ an assistant when you can have a lovely new wife to do it all for you?'

She smiled, acknowledging she recognised that he was joking. 'She could be an interim measure, until you get a lovely new wife?'

He shook his head. 'Not necessary, I'm positive. Kirstie is the one. I can't wait for you to meet her. I know you'll get on.'

## Chapter Three



Leaving Burthen House, Lorna walked home across the park that once had deer roaming in it, and would one day, she hoped, have some rare-breed sheep. She'd heard Peter being enthusiastic about girlfriends before but this was different. He was obviously besotted. And if Kirstie felt the same, then there was no point in her keeping her little flame of hope alive. She'd better just try and get over it.

'Lorna!' said Anthea, opening her front door wide. 'How wonderful to see someone civilised. And it means I can have coffee.'

Lorna slipped her feet out of her boots. Peter's mother lived in the Dower House. The fact that there was such a handsome one as part of the estate had been one of the reasons he'd bought it, that and the fact he had to do something with the obscene amount of money he earned.

Anthea was a firm friend to Lorna and she followed into her kitchen.

'And have you heard?' Anthea went on. 'Peter is officially in love!' She managed to make this state sound unspeakably vulgar.

'He does seem very happy.' Glad that she didn't have to break this news, Lorna kept her tone neutral.

'He sounds deranged.' Anthea slapped the kettle on to her ancient Aga. 'He's just been on the telephone. Told me about this dinner party. To be honest, Lorna darling, I'd find it easier if he wasn't so ecstatic. I mean, has he lost all his critical faculties? He's nearly sixty, for God's sake.'

'Speaking as someone who's getting on that way I don't think it necessarily makes you any wiser.'

'Well, no,' Anthea agreed. 'But when it's one's son involved, one does rather hope it might.' The kettle having now boiled, Anthea filled a coffee pot with water to warm it and then set about finding beans, grinding them and eventually putting two pots on the table, one with coffee, the other with hot milk. 'I always have instant when I'm on my own so it's nice to have an excuse to make proper coffee.'

Lorna, who had seated herself at the table, breathed in the smell. 'I think you make the best coffee of anyone I know.'

Anthea put down two bone-china mugs – a compromise between her really preferring cups and

saucers and yet appreciating mugs didn't need topping up so often. 'Thank you.' She began pouring. 'So you don't think Peter's gone entirely mad? Meeting this girl one night and practically moving her in the next?'

'Is she moving in?' This was news and a shock.

'No, I don't think so. But this dinner party – apparently she's asking lots of her friends who have to stay the night. What the poor staff will do about proper bedlinen I don't know.' She frowned. 'It's just it's all so sudden. And I'll have to do flowers.'

'I thought you loved doing flowers. I thought that was your thing.'

'It is, but I'm on church flower duty that week and won't want to be up at the house trying to hide the damp patches behind the arrangements.' Anthea took a comforting sip of coffee.

'I could ask Philly to do them,' Lorna suggested. 'I'm already going to ask her to wait at table. Apparently Kirstie knows a good caterer but he needs a waiter. Possibly a kitchen assistant too. Philly could do both. If she's not too busy with her market stall.'

'Is Philly the one who raises plants for you? Nice girl. Although she always looks at me as if I'm going to eat her.' Anthea frowned. 'Maybe it would be better if I didn't try and smile. It's the smile that terrifies them.'

Lorna laughed. 'She is shy but very efficient. I'll

ask her to help out but we have to get Peter to pay her properly.'

'Hmm. The trouble with Peter is he's always been so charming he expects to get everything for nothing. I'll get him to pay her a hundred pounds. Is that enough? I mean, it sounds like a small fortune to me but I'm still living in the Dark Ages.'

'It would be generous but appropriate,' said Lorna, glad to think Philly would get a reasonable sum out of it. 'I just hope she can help.'

'I'm sure for a hundred pounds she'll be able to,' said Anthea. 'Did you want a biscuit? Toast?' When Lorna had shaken her head, she went on: 'So what do we think about this Kirstie?'

'Without having met her, it's hard to say, but Peter is obviously enraptured.'

'Doesn't sound a good thing at his age.'

'I think it's lovely. Don't we all want to be swept off our feet?'

'Absolutely not! Didn't want it when I was a girl, don't want it now.' Anthea sounded so appalled and so vehement, she obviously shocked herself. 'Of course I was in love with my husband, but it was an emotion that grew as we got to know each other. It wasn't a *coup de foudre*. I distrust passionate emotions that come out of nowhere.'

'Well, I see your point,' said Lorna, whose loyalties were stretched in both directions. She would have enjoyed having an old-fashioned bitch about

this unknown woman but also wanted to support Peter. If this was the real thing, she had to go along with it. 'But judging by what he's told me about her, she seems nice. Interested in the gardens, which makes me inclined to like her.'

'You don't think she's just after him for his money, do you?'

'I shouldn't think so. I mean, the house needs a lot of doing up. He doesn't flaunt his wealth. She may not know he's rich.'

'He's mean, you mean.'

Lorna laughed. 'Not really! I mean, I know he's careful – probably how he got to be so rich – but he doesn't have a flashy car – if you overlook having a driver.' She paused. 'Actually, him having a driver will tell her exactly how rich he is. But let's give her the benefit of the doubt. At least until we've met her.'

'Very well then. We'll be on our best behaviour and tear her apart afterwards.'

'But only if she holds her knife like a pen,' said Lorna.

Anthea laughed. 'I do wish it could have been you, Lorna. We've always understood each other.'

'Well, if it's not meant, it's not. We'll always be friends anyway. And I hope he's very happy.'

'Very magnanimous of you, dear. Personally I'd want that outrageous fortune for myself!'

'To be honest, being happy in my work, which I

am, having a nice house, which – thanks to you and Peter’s estate – I have, and being healthy is pretty much enough.’ It wasn’t *absolutely* enough but Lorna wasn’t going to share that. ‘And having my son also well and happy and in work, which I’m pleased to tell you is currently the situation, is almost perfect.’

‘How very wise you are, my dear,’ said Anthea.

Wishing she felt as wise as the impression she had given Anthea, Lorna went home to get her car and then drove to Philly’s.

Philly was in the greenhouse, checking her plants. She jumped when she heard someone behind her. ‘Oh, Lorna, it’s you. How nice.’

‘I found Seamus and he told me you were here. He said you wouldn’t mind if I came and found you. Please don’t let me stop you working.’

‘Did you come to see what I’m growing for this season? I’d just decided that I’ve chosen all the wrong stuff and none of it will sell.’

Lorna laughed. ‘You said that last year and everything went.’

‘Because you bought it!’ Philly was never sure if basing a business on only one client was sensible. It mean there wasn’t any wastage but she knew her parents would say it was putting all her eggs in one basket.

‘You grew what I wanted. But I’m not here about



that. I have a job for you.’ Lorna frowned slightly. ‘Maybe if you’re ready to stop we could talk about it in the house?’

‘That sounds mysterious, but I’m more than happy to stop.’

Philly led the way to the house wondering what Lorna was looking awkward about. She made them both tea and found some cake.

‘This is why I came, really,’ said Lorna. She was seated at the kitchen table, looking enthusiastic as Philly cut into the chocolate confection.

‘This is what my grandfather calls “gattox”,’ said Philly. ‘He won’t be told that only works if there’s more than one of them.’

‘I’m going to call it gattox myself now you’ve told me,’ said Lorna.

‘So,’ said Philly. ‘What can I do for you?’

Lorna frowned again. ‘Well, it’s two things and I’m not sure you’re going to be keen because it’s on a Saturday and I know you’re busy at the market on Saturdays.’

‘Is it a waitressing job? That’s OK, it’ll be in the evening.’

‘It is a waitressing job but they also want you to do the flowers. It’s for Peter and . . .’ Lorna paused just for a second. ‘Kirstie. He has a new girlfriend and they’re having a dinner party so he can show her off to people – his mother, me, etc.’

‘Oh.’ Philly had always suspected that Lorna had

a soft spot for Peter herself, although she'd never said anything. 'What's she like? Have you met her?'

'No. The dinner party will be the first time. She's got a caterer but he wants a waiter and maybe some prepping help. And Anthea wants you to do the flowers.'

'It would be a long day but I expect it'll be OK. Do they want me to provide flowers as well?'

'I think they expect you to just cut a few branches from the grounds. There are some trees just coming into leaf, some winter-flowering things still doing their thing, and lots and lots of bulbs.'

'That is the sort of flower arranging I like,' said Philly.

'That's what I thought. And I've managed to get you a hundred pounds. But that includes the waitressing.'

'That sounds OK,' said Philly, having done a quick sum. 'Better than the minimum wage anyway. I wonder if they'd mind if I did the flowers the day before?'

'I'm sure they wouldn't. I'll tell Doreen – you know? The housekeeper? I'll be there too, to make sure you get given the best vases. Some of them are tucked away in rooms that aren't used.'

'I must say, it would be nice if more of the house was in use, wouldn't it? It's such a huge place, with a massive garden and currently it's just Peter and the staff.'

Lorna gave a tiny sigh. 'Yes, it would be nice if it were used more. Maybe Kirstie will open it all up and there'll be weekend house parties and things.'

'Weekend house parties are very good for the market,' said Philly. 'Lots of new money circulating.'

'It would be good for the town generally, actually. The fact that the house is within walking distance of the town means they probably would shop a bit and go to the pub . . .'

Lorna fell silent at the thought of Kirstie presiding over social events at Peter's side.

'You don't sound terribly pleased about it though,' said Philly.