Beatrice

Noëlle Harrison

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Extract

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PROLOGUE

All Souls' Day, dawn

She woke; mouth dry, heart thundering, limbs stiff, rose from the stone floor and wrapped a blanket about her shoulders. She was still in her dress. She felt the shadow of her sleep and wanted to climb back into it. The boarded windows made the cottage as dark as death. It restrained her fleetingly. She opened the door.

Birdsong enveloped her. A gentle mist had begun to rise from the fields, like steam, like breath, like life.

She walked down to the stream, following the cattle tracks, and stood on the muddy bank, dropped the blanket, pulled off her dress and slipped out of her clogs. She stood naked for a minute, feeling the early winter chill encircling her. Her skin goosepimpled but she did not shake. Steadily she walked into the stream and immersed herself in the cloudy water.

It was deep in the middle, and she could feel minnows brush past her body. The solitude of dawn made her feel safe. The world was not yet in motion.

When the tips of her fingers started to prune and she began to feel blue, she got out of the water. Carrying her dress and clogs, she walked back to the cottage with only the blanket around her. She left the door open to bring in the light, lit a

fire, and brewed some tea. When she was dry, she put on her clothes and an old jersey that was lying on the single battered chair. She waited.

A breeze whispered through the trees behind the cottage; a solitary leaf spun down the chimney breast. She squeezed a small wild flower in her hand and smelt it.

An hour later a car pulled up outside. She picked up her blanket and her bag, went out and got into the car. She handed the driver her bag; he looked inside. There was a pearl necklace, a blue silk scarf, a pink beret, a red leather-bound sketchbook, a mother-of-pearl compact and an embroidered purse.

ONE: THE PEARLS

EITHNE

She is in the woods, burrowing into the earth, under a giant lime tree.

I found the pearls curled beneath a root; they gleamed at me. A delicate string, each pearl perfection, with an unopened gold clasp. Beatrice had bought them in Majorca that summer. Pearls. Belonging to somewhere exotic. I held them in my hands, still a child's hands, my skin soft and unblemished, my fingertips sensitive. I closed my eyes and fingered each iridescent orb. Such glamour hidden in my woods. What were they doing in this dark, wintry place? These treasures from the sea were so far away from their source. Were they a gift from my sister, like all the secrets she had shared with me in the dark, in our bedroom?

I stood in the woods, the pearls twisted around my wrist, silently stroking them. The land cleared around me then, and suddenly I had perfect vision. I saw a thousand trails which wound in and out of the trees. Zones of green ferns picked up patches of sunlight, and clusters of milky white mushrooms cleaved to the sides of gnarled roots, which looked like bony fingers gripping onto the dark earth for dear life.

I came here nearly every day. Walking about, observing, never being part of anything, looking in from the outside. The woods were just five minutes away from our house: take a left outside the front door, swing to the right, past the old dive of a pub, and then down the hill, climb the fence, edge round the

field on a muddy track, and into the dark until the spindly broken-down trees surrounded you. My wood was not a place most would choose to walk in. It wasn't attractive – no broadleaved trees, or dainty beech, just churned up mud track and the bitter scent of spruce. Once you were inside, solitude enveloped you. I had always liked this, and I had never been afraid of being on my own . . . not until this day.

Now I had found the pearls, and with them I uncovered fear. In that instant, my innocent, thirteen-year-old mind conceived the inconceivable – I was not safe.

I stuffed the pearls into my pocket, and called the dog. We ran then, slipping and sliding – such a long way – to the field. Out in the open it had begun to rain – a bleak, lashing downpour. Only when I reached the hard tarmac did I slow down; then I could not hurry home. My feet dragged as I stomped back up the hill. Was I crying? It was hard to tell with the rain streaming down my face.

Mammy went white, then sank back in her chair.

'Beatrice,' she whispered.

She squeezed the pearls tight in her fingers, as if she could make them burst.

'Get her a brandy,' Uncle Jack said. I got the decanter.

The Garda shook his head.

'This does not look good,' he whispered to Jack.

Beatrice had been gone a week.

Beatrice's hair rippled over her shoulders and down her back like a waterfall of fire. My sister Beatrice was beautiful. She was

tall, and she held herself like a dancer, although she had never been to a ballet lesson in her life. Even her imperfections were beautiful: the little scar by the side of her eye, where she had knocked herself on the side of the bath as a toddler; her nose was slightly crooked – my fault, playing handball. Her hands as well were incredibly elegant, with long slender fingers and perfect almond-shaped nails. And they were always busy: painting, drawing, holding a cigarette, tickling me . . .

I sit in my bay window, looking at night spreading across Dublin. I have walked a long way today, the length of the South Pier, hitting the Irish Sea and a sense of anonymity. I massage my sore feet as lights come on in the streets outside, and my reflection becomes clear in the glass. I scrutinize myself. I am thirty-two, although I don't look it. My eyes still hold their shocked innocence, the way they looked when I was thirteen. I have no child; I cannot begin to imagine how my mother felt when my sister Beatrice disappeared nineteen years ago. It was Hallowe'en and she was coming home for the weekend, but she never arrived. She left Dublin on time, catching a bus at half past eight and arriving in the village at about ten. She knew Mammy was working so, instead of waiting around, she decided to hitch the last few miles home. It's something we all did, although maybe not at night . . .

Who saw her standing there in the dark? Who stopped and put her into their car? Was it someone we all knew? Was there a monster among us? Who was it and where did they take her?

Beatrice was never found. Just some of her things: a string of pearls, a scarf, a hat, a sketchbook and a compact. She must be somewhere in the woods, but they dug and they dug, and they

searched every nook and every cranny and never found her. It was a mystery; Beatrice had just disappeared. She was an open book, a life with no end that had hardly begun.

When the search for Beatrice began to slow, my mother sat down and it felt like she never got up again. Not for years. She kept vigil by the back door, staring out of the window across the bog as if she could will her daughter to return. At first, everyone came to see how she was – friends, neighbours, my father's family – but when they could get nothing out of her, so that they felt even more useless and redundant than before, they all gave up. After six months they began to say she was wallowing in her anguish, and she should pull herself together: for Joseph's sake; for me . . . but really, they just couldn't face the honesty. My mother's brutal misery was too much. It was not the way things were dealt with. A good Irishwoman shoulders her misfortune and carries on no matter what. But my mother was English. She was different.

There was one neighbour who didn't say or think these things. Her name was Assumpta Lynch. The very day after Beatrice disappeared, Assumpta came round. She came straight in the back door without even knocking, went up to the kitchen table, grabbed a chair and sat down next to my mother. She said nothing, just held her hand. She sat there for well over an hour, and not a word was said between the two women. Then just as suddenly she turned to me and said, 'Put the kettle on Eithne, there's a good girl.'

Assumpta came every day. She made tea for Mammy, lacing it with brandy. She cooked the dinner for us all; and then she just sat next to Mammy for hours.

On the third week Mammy began to cry. As Assumpta gripped her hand, Mammy shuddered and wrenched out deep,

guttural sobs from her belly from some place close to her womb. It was desperate.

And where was Daddy? He was like a shadow, at that time, drifting in and out of the house. Mammy's grief lost him, and so he dealt with it the only way he knew how – in the pub.

One day when Beatrice was about twelve, Mammy sat her down and told her everything about her past. She did it because of Daddy's drinking. He had collapsed in the main street again, this time in the middle of the day. Mammy was so mad with him. He had shamed her, and she got back at him the only way she could think of; by telling his daughter she was not his. It was Mammy who broke up the family.

I was only eight then, and had no interest in their chat so I played out in the garden while Mammy and Beatrice sat huddled at the kitchen table, drinking tea and talking till way past dark.

That night, as we lay tucked up in our beds, Beatrice repeated the tale in broken whispers. I was completely absorbed by the drama and romance of my mother's past. This girl Beatrice talked about had passion and spirit, she was like a heroine from one of Beatrice's romantic novels. I could not identify her with the worn woman who was my mother.

'My real father is completely different from Daddy,' Beatrice whispered.

'Do you mean we don't have the same Daddy?'

'Yes, of course stupid. That's what I'm telling you . . . my father was called Jonathan. Not Joseph, but Jonathan. Mammy called him Jon.'

'But why didn't they get married? Why did Mammy marry Daddy?'

'That's a long, long story. You see, Eithne, things weren't that simple, especially then. Jonathan, my daddy, and Mammy came from very different backgrounds and well, in those days, it was very hard for the two classes to mix.'

'What do you mean classes?'

'Mammy's family were poor, they were what you would call working class. Her father had to work very hard to make not very much money, and then, she said, her mother used to spend it all.'

'Why don't we ever visit them over in England?'

'Wait and let me finish telling you about my father – you see his family were very rich, so rich in fact that his father didn't really have to work – he was a lord—'

'Wow! Did they have a castle?'

'No – they weren't those kind of lords – they were just very – posh – and Mammy worked for them so that's why they didn't want my daddy, Jonathan, to marry Mammy . . . he was very good-looking she told me. Very fair she said, blond hair with streaks of gold and thick like mine, and he was tall and elegant.'

I could sense her eyes closing and her mind dreaming. I wanted to know more – why didn't he fight for Mammy like a real prince? And where did my daddy come into it? Was he working class too?

SARAH

Sarah Quigley left for London on a bright sunny day in October 1962. She had packed one small case with a change of clothes, some stockings and underwear, her nightdress and a hairbrush. In her handbag was a new lipstick called 'Sweet Cherry', which she had bought the day before, some violet eau de toilette, which her mother didn't want, and the old mother-of-pearl compact which had belonged to her father's mother. Her father had also handed her five one-pound notes, the night before, which she had carefully folded into her new leatherette purse. She had the directions to her new home, meticulously written down on a large sheet of paper, which was also folded and in her handbag. She had everything she could need for her new life.

Her train was at ten o'clock, in exactly one hour. She looked around her sparse bedroom one last time, at the row of tiny china dolls from all over the world which her father had bought down at the docks – the Chinese one in its red silk top winked at her, and Sarah felt it knew she wasn't coming back. She went down the narrow staircase; her parents were sitting at the kitchen table with a pot of tea.

'Do you want a cuppa?' asked her mother.

'No, I think I'll be off,' she said. 'It's a bit of a walk; I don't want to miss the train.'

'Shall I come with you pet?' asked her father.

'No, Dad. It's best I go on my own, don't you think?'

He nodded, his Adam's apple rising and falling.

She walked towards the door; her mother's back was to her and all she could see were her father's watery eyes staring across the kitchen table. He looked very small, whereas her mother's back was a hulk, a giant boulder of flowered material. Sarah watched her pick up the pot and pour more tea.

'Well, mind you don't get into trouble now,' her mother warned her. 'You work hard, and be a good girl.'

Sarah bit her tongue. 'Yes, mother.'

'We'll see you at Christmas, then,' said her father. 'It won't be long. Be careful, love.'

'I will, Daddy,' Sarah said and left.

She stepped out into the narrow street, and walked its length for the last time, past row upon row of neat red-brick houses, and rounded the corner. She could see Southampton docks in the distance, cranes crowding the skyline, a heavy grey smog hanging over them. She breathed in, as relief began to warm her chilled hands: she was getting out of here. The fear had always been with her that she would never leave. But now, at only sixteen, she already had her first job, a good one in London. She and Sally Langley had been determined to move away, and the day they had finished school they had bought a copy of the *Lady* magazine between them. Inside its pages were all kinds of advertisements for nannies and housekeepers, cooks and gardeners, as well as more mundane domestic positions, which were what the two girls were after. Sally's long-term plan was to train to be a nanny. But Sarah's desire to go to London came from romantic dreams on rainy Saturday afternoons; it was the place to be, the hub of everything, where you'd be bound to meet someone and fall in love.

The two girls had spent a whole week labouring over their

letters of application but it had been worth it. Sally was thrilled to secure a position as an au pair in Tunbridge Wells, and Sarah had got the first job she applied for: doing general domestic duties for Sir Eric and Lady Voyle at their house in Kidderpore Avenue, Hampstead, London.

Sarah settled well into the Voyle household. Lady Voyle took an immediate shine to her.

'Aren't you a pretty little thing,' she had commented the day Sarah arrived. 'You'll certainly brighten the place up.'

The Voyles' house was at least three times the size of the houses back home, no, more like four, thought Sarah. It had four floors. There was a basement, which she was never asked to go into, but was told housed the wine. The ground floor was dominated by an incredibly grand dining room with a table which seemed to stretch for eternity. When Sir Eric and Lady Voyle dined at home, they sat at either end of the table, and Sarah had to walk between them to serve their food. Next to the dining room was a succession of different living rooms; Sarah couldn't work out which was which and what they were all for. Finally, there was the kitchen where Sarah spent most of her time, staring out of the window and looking at the trees out the back and the blustery London sky, while she topped and tailed vegetables, things she'd never seen or heard of like French beans.

On the first floor were the bedrooms – five of them. Sarah had to make the beds, but she didn't mind because it gave her a chance to make tiny forays into this magical world of privilege. She especially loved Lady Voyle's room, with all the perfume bottles and trinkets on her dressing table, and its rich odour of sensual fabrics and clean linen.

On the second floor – the attic – were the staff bedrooms, one for Sarah and one for Rachel, the housekeeper. Lady Voyle had been almost apologetic when she had shown Sarah to her bedroom, but to Sarah it seemed immense. She loved the view best of all: a tiny window looked out onto the roof, over which she could behold the sparkling, glittering night-time panorama of London. It made her catch her breath. At night, before she went to bed, she would repeat to herself again and again, 'I did it, I did it, I did it,' pinching her arm to make sure it wasn't a dream and that she really had escaped Southampton.

Sarah hated her home because her mother resented her. Betty Quigley always blamed Sarah for ruining her figure, and for making more domestic work. After Sarah was born Betty never let her husband touch her again. Sarah's father was a meek man at home and chose to stay away as much as possible, spending every daylight hour working down at the docks and, as a result, he was made foreman. Sarah was left on her own to face her mother's biting temper. She couldn't wait to get away from her.

At the Voyles' house everyone was nice to Sarah. Rachel was very kind and patient, and explained things carefully to her. She praised her often, and Sarah began to feel more and more comfortable.

Lady Voyle considered herself a bohemian, 'One of the people' she liked to say. She painted, often going on trips to Italy and France, and when she returned she would set up small private viewings of her watercolours in one of the living rooms. Lady Voyle was Sarah's first contact with art. When she noticed Sarah spending more time looking at her paintings than cleaning, she gave her a sketchbook and a set of pencils; it didn't even occur to her to tell her servant off.

Sir Eric was a politician. At home he was quiet, polite, and happy to leave Lady Voyle in charge of domestic affairs. Sarah hardly ever saw him during the day because he was always out, and every evening, religiously, he would head off to his club.

Rachel told her that the Voyles were a very old family with good breeding, which was why, she claimed, they treated their staff so well. Rachel had worked for a terrible nouveau riche family; never again, she said. But the Voyle household was a pleasant one, full of charm, good manners and peace, apart from the hourly chime of the grandfather clock, and the cherry trees scraping the kitchen window on windy afternoons.

The Voyles had two children – twins and both boys – who had spent the past seven years away from home at boarding school. Both sons had just entered the hallowed grounds of Oxford University in the footsteps of every Voyle male before them.

Sarah had met the twins briefly during her first weekend in Hampstead when the two boys had come down from Oxford to visit their parents. Anthony introduced himself stiffly and shook her hand rigorously before letting it go. He was taller than the other boy, and had short, dark hair, and a long, fine nose. The other one, Jonathan, was talking to his mother; he merely glanced over at her and continued laughing and chatting, his golden curls flopping all over his forehead, and his green eyes sparkling, while he thrust his hands into his jacket pockets.

'Did you meet the boys?' Rachel asked her later, as they were eating their own meal after the family had gone out.

'Yes . . . they're very different,' said Sarah.

'And not just in looks,' said Rachel. 'I've seen them both grow up, and they've turned into lovely young men, although

it's Jonathan who's the real charmer. He's always coming in here and distracting me while I'm trying to work – making me giggle and such like.'

'What about Anthony?'

'Oh, he's a little more aloof – it's Jonathan I know better.'

At Christmas the twins were due back for the holidays. Sarah was cleaning the stairs with a hard brush. She turned as Jonathan burst through the front door, hallooing and full of Christmas cheer. She was hot and out of breath with rosy cheeks and rising chest, her eyes were bright and her hair was loose and falling in curls about her face. Tendrils stuck to her temples, and perspiration clung like dew to her forehead. Jonathan was taken aback.

'Who are you?'

'I'm Sarah Quigley. We met—'

'Oh yes . . . of course— Where is my mother?' His confusion made him suddenly rude.

'In her room.'

He brushed past her as he went up the stairs. A little too hard. What he really wanted to do was reach out and touch her with his hand. He bit his lip.

Sarah had not gone home for Christmas because Lady Voyle needed her, she said, for all of the extra dinner parties she had arranged. Rachel did all the cooking, but Sarah had to do all the legwork – vegetable preparation, cleaning, washing-up. She did not mind. Christmas at home was dull. She could not bear another year of her father's forced cheer, as her mother moaned about the size of the turkey and the price of everything. She

pictured him as he valiantly put up the tiny plastic tree while his wife berated him about the inferior quality of the decorations. Here she was an outsider, she could watch others enjoy Christmas.

On New Year's Eve the Voyles went to a party and Rachel had gone home to spend the evening with her family, so Sarah was on her own in the house. She cleared the dinner plates, washed them, and prepared the potatoes for the following day, leaving them in a pot of cold water. Then she swept and mopped the floor, wiped the table and sat down to enjoy a glass of champagne. Lady Voyle had left an opened bottle for her – it was half full. Sarah looked at the clock – five minutes to twelve. She had never drunk champagne before. She closed her eyes and imagined a different life.

Disturbed by a tap on the window, she looked up and saw Jonathan standing there, with a tipsy grin on his face. She opened the door.

'I was thinking of you,' he said. 'On your own here on New Year's Eve. I couldn't leave you by yourself. Who would you kiss when the clock struck twelve?'

What was she supposed to do? She had never had a boyfriend; she had never even kissed a man, apart from her father – and now this attention from a young, clever, rich, but most of all, handsome man who was interested in her. All of a sudden she felt incredibly dizzy, the champagne made her sway. As she lunged towards a chair, Jonathan moved quickly, sweeping her off her feet.

He filled up her glass with one hand, while, with his other arm, he held her tight around her waist.

'Let's toast the new year in,' he said. 'Five, four, three, two, one. Happy New Year!'

He leant forward and kissed her: hard, needy, immediately pushing his tongue into her mouth. The girls in Oxford did not go all the way. He wanted all the way.

They were on the floor, her clean floor. Her skirt was still on. She had not said one word. She looked at his face; his eyes were closed. He was beautiful.

Afterwards he carried her up to her room. He wanted to see her naked and took off her blouse, her skirt and all her underwear. She lay still, breathless, watching. He stood in front of her and took all of his clothes off. Then he bent over her, scooped her up, and pushed inside her.

'You're so sweet,' he murmured into her ear. 'You smell so sweet . . .'

She said nothing, but gasped suddenly as she felt him in her, as she remembered what his naked body had looked like.

Every night after that Jonathan went to Sarah's room. It was their big secret. Every night Sarah went all the way.

The third day after new year was a Wednesday and Sarah's day off. Jonathan watched her from his bedroom window as she left the house, smothered in a dark green coat, gloves, hat and scarf, scuttling like a tiny beetle down the icy road. The sight of her touched him and without thinking he ran down the stairs, grabbed a coat and slipped along the icy pavement until he caught her up.

'Jonathan! What are doing here?'

'I've been watching you, Miss Sarah Quigley. Where are you off to on such a freezing cold day?'

'I'm going up to the Heath for a walk.'

'Oh, how boring! And how cold! Let's do something far more interesting, my sweet Eliza Doolittle.'

Sarah blushed. She didn't know why he was calling her that,

but he sounded so affectionate. She looked back nervously at the house, could anyone see them? Meanwhile, Jonathan had hailed a black cab. He held the door open for her; she got in feeling like a princess.

The taxi flew into town. They got out at Victoria Station and walked down to the Thames. It was freezing; a cold wind bit into them, and the river churned dark and swollen beside them. There were very few people about, since it was still the holiday season. Jonathan walked behind Sarah and thrust his frozen hands into her coat pockets. She could feel his body pressed against her back. He was so tall, he could rest his chin on the crown of her head.

'I am going to take you to see some art.' He spoke loudly against the wind.

He led her to the Tate Gallery. Once inside, the paintings became a blur; Sarah was dizzy with emotion.

There was one room where Jonathan called the work pre-Raphaelite. She did not ask him what the word might mean – she just nodded and looked. Jonathan talked and talked about the artists. It was the most he had ever said to her – she was his audience. They stopped in front of a painting of a beautiful young woman, bathed in a celestial light. Her eyes were closed. She looked to Sarah as though she were praying, no, more than just prayer – pleading. A dove delivered a flower into her hands. Sarah read the label by the painting: 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti – *Beata Beatrix*'.

'Who is she?' she asked.

'Dante's lover.'

Jonathan said it as though she should know who he meant. She felt stupid, but she did not care – here she was in the Tate Gallery, looking at paintings with a stunning young man. He wanted to talk about art with *her*.

They ate tea in the steamy restaurant in the Tate Gallery. Sarah had never been so happy.

Then the Christmas break was over. Jonathan went back to university and everything went back to normal. But there was something Sarah had not thought about, and now she was worried. The possibility of pregnancy had never been mentioned in their nightly trysts. Sarah had thought that if she washed well afterwards nothing could happen. But now she started to feel sick – it could not be true. She would wait a few weeks until Easter, then Jonathan would be home and he would know what to do.

The Easter break arrived and the twins came home. But with them came two girls – Harriet and Charlotte. Charlotte was Jonathan's girlfriend; she was petite, blonde and bubbly.

'What do you think of the gals?' Lady Voyle asked while Rachel and Sarah were laying the table. 'Nice gals, don't you think? Well raised, intelligent. They are both studying English literature at St Hilda's. I really admire gals who decide to educate themselves before they even think about marriage.'

Sarah was dumb with shock. She did her work like a robot.

'Are you all right, Sarah?' asked Lady Voyle, noticing her servant's stricken face. 'You look very tired.'

During the day Jonathan ignored Sarah. He went out with Charlotte, taking her into town to shop in Kensington, or to a lunchtime concert or an art gallery. Every day when they left the house, Jonathan helped Charlotte on with her coat, gave her

a gentle peck on the cheek, and opened the door for her. They walked down the street arm in arm; she was so small she could rest her head on his shoulder. In the evenings, the family dined together. There was much giggling and touching of hands between Jonathan and Charlotte. To all outward appearances it seemed that Jonathan had completely lost interest in Sarah.

But he could not stop looking at her, furtively, incessantly. Sometimes after breakfast there would be a small square of paper under Jonathan's cereal bowl, which Sarah would find and shove in her pocket. As soon as she could she'd rush to the toilet and take it out with shaking hands. The messages were brief: 'Behind the greenhouse, twenty minutes' or 'In the basement, half an hour'. Concocting ever more ridiculous excuses each day, so that she began to sense Rachel was becoming suspicious, Sarah would sneak off to meet her lover. That's what he was to her – her lover. He was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to her, and she found it impossible to be sensible, or work out exactly what she was doing. Blind with faith in him, or in something intangible which she was sure existed between them, she would stumble down the basement steps and find Jonathan hiding between the rows of bottles.

'I've missed you, darling,' he would say, as he began to unbutton her top. 'I love you, I love you . . .' he'd chant softly. Here was her chance to speak, when he was tender and caring, caressing her and telling her he loved her, until his body arched and he came inside her.

Then he would become detached and it would be too late. The expression on his face changed perceptibly. It made her shiver.

After he had gone Sarah would cry, alone in the dark, shoving her fingers into the ancient dust which had gathered between the bottles.

Once, before he could leave, she caught his hand, and in shaking whispers asked him, 'Are you ashamed of me?'

Jonathan turned, his face a picture of concern, 'Sarah, dear sweet Sarah,' he said. 'Of course I'm not ashamed of you. I love you – but you see I made a commitment to Charlotte before I met you and I have to let her down gently. It would be cruel . . .'

Sarah nodded. He was so noble.

'It's you I want. You know that don't you? And one day we'll be together. You're an angel, that's what you are. I've never met anyone so good, so unselfish.'

Sarah remembered her mother saying that the only way a woman could keep a man's interest was by being demanding and self-centred, 'To keep 'em on their toes' she had said. But why should her mother be right? She let go of his hand; she let him go back.

Sarah never mentioned the baby. And Jonathan never talked about marriage. After two weeks he went back to Oxford with Charlotte wrapped around him. Sarah began to expand, and her limited wardrobe started to be a problem. Rachel teased her about helping herself to too much steak and kidney pie, but at times she looked at Sarah anxiously.

Sarah knew she was running out of time. She went to Oxford. By now it was May, but still cold. She sat all day opposite Christ Church College watching for Jonathan. She was shivering by the time she eventually saw him with a group of friends, laughing and carefree.

'Jon! Jonathan!' she called.

He looked over at her and his face clouded. He crossed the road, his hands in his pockets. His friends stared at her.

'What on earth are you doing here?' he demanded.

She recoiled as if he had slapped her. What had happened to him?

'I have to talk to you,' she stuttered.

'Sarah, I can't talk to you here, go home. We'll talk next weekend.'

'Please.' Her voice quavered.

'Oh, come on, then,' he said. 'Since you are here, we may as well get a cup of tea. I'll see you later!' he shouted over to his friends who drifted off.

Jonathan took Sarah to a cafe. He ordered tea and scones while Sarah took off her coat.

'Goodness, Sarah,' he said, 'you have put on weight.'

She started to cry.