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12th September 1999

Dearest Ana,

I never expected to have a sister. I was eleven years old when you came along and thought that the world revolved around me. Everyone expected me to be so jealous of you but I loved you from the first moment I set eyes on you. You were so tiny and weak in that incubator and I thought that I would die if anything happened to you. I'd just started my periods at the time and I remember thinking how I could have been your mother. When you came home I wanted you all to myself. I thought you were mine. I didn't let Mum get near you. You were so precious and perfect, like a tiny little doll – almost like you were custom-made for my small arms. And you were such a good little girl. So obedient, always happy to tag along with me and run errands for me. You even gave me my name – Bee. I'd always hated Belinda, and then one day you were calling after me and you called out Bee and it stuck. I've been Bee since that day and I can't imagine a time when I was called anything else.

You probably don't remember much about the few years we lived together in Main Street. But I do. I remember everything. And you and I were very close. After Dad left I felt like I was all alone in the world. And then when Mum remarried I felt completely abandoned. Until you came along. You were my little sister and I loved you. I'll never forget your face when I left, the tears running down your cheeks and the way you insisted I take your rabbit, William. Do you remember him? I've still got him, you know. He sleeps beside me, on my

pillow. I always used to think he brought me good luck, but I'm not so sure any more . . .

You were four years old when I left and you thought I was abandoning you. I want to explain to you now why I had to leave. Life with Mum was unbearable, obviously, but it wasn't just that. There was so much I wanted to do with my life and none of it was in Devon – it was all in London. But, if I'm to be completely honest with you – and I may as well be, now – I've nothing to lose – the main reason I left was because I was jealous of you. For having Bill. Your very own father. And even when you were tiny you looked just like him and there was this huge bond between you. I had no one. Only Mum and . . . well, you know.

I wanted to be with my father. So I left and went to live with Dad in London, and as much as it broke my heart to leave you behind, it was the best decision I ever made. I loved my father so much, Ana, and I'm in pain thinking about how you must be feeling now, without Bill. He was a wonderful, kind and gracious man. He was gentle and quiet, like you, and I can't tell you how sorry I am for you. I also want you to know that it does get better. The pain does go away. Eventually. It really does. I won't be at the funeral, Ana. It's all too complicated, as I'm sure you're aware, but I want you to know that I'll be thinking about you every single second on Thursday.

I think about you often, Ana. I don't know what you're doing now or who you're with or anything. But I often wish you were here. I should have written before, I know that. We should have kept our bond, but circumstance and Mum and all that stupid ephemeral stuff seems to have got in the way of us being what we used to be – sisters. I'd love it if you came to visit, Ana – came to stay with me. I'm living in a beautiful flat in Belsize Park (that's posh, by the way!) and I've got a cat and a motorbike. I think you'd love London. You were always such a shy little thing. So nervous. Sometimes you need to take yourself out of a familiar situation and throw yourself into the unknown to get to know yourself properly, to find out who you really are. God – listen to me – I'm acting like time stood still after the last time I saw you, like you're

still thirteen! You're probably living in New York or trekking through the Himalayas or something right now. But somehow, Ana, I can't quite imagine it . . .

It's hard to imagine at your age, but one day you'll be thirty-six years old – it'll happen before you know it. You won't have any youth left to look forward to – it'll all be behind you and you'll wonder where the hell it went. Don't waste it, please. I've realized that I was never meant to be middle-aged. Every night, when I stand in the bathroom brushing my teeth, I look in the mirror and I cry, because it's the end of another day. It's like a little death, every day. Music doesn't move me any more. Kind words and good friends and happy days don't move me. The thought of the future doesn't move me. There's no magic left in anything. What I'm trying to say is this – youth is so fleeting – now's the time to take risks. Did you keep up your music lessons? The guitar? And singing? You must be so brilliant by now – it wouldn't surprise me if you were a hundred times more talented than me. Well, it wouldn't surprise me if anyone was more talented than me, but that's a different story!

I've changed a lot, Ana, since we last met. I've learned guitar! And I've grown up a lot. I'm not that ambitious, greedy, hard-nosed girl I used to be. Things have happened over the years. Terrible things. Things that change a person beyond recognition. Things that I could never tell anyone about. And I'm humbler now and hopefully I'm nicer, too. God, I'm rambling. Sorry. All I'm trying to say is that I'd love to spend some time with you. Here, in London. I know you probably feel like you don't owe me anything, and you don't. I've been a terrible sister to you – selfish, self-serving, thoughtless. But I've always loved you, and nothing would make me happier than to spend some time with you now. Show you my world and the new, improved Bee. I'd love to see London through your eyes – it might reawaken the magic within me . . . And to get to know you. Yes – mostly, I want to get to know you.

I don't expect to hear from you again. But nothing would make me happier. I want this very much.

My thoughts will be with you tomorrow. Please say a prayer for Bill from me.

Your ever-loving sister.

Bee xxxx

Prologue

January 2000

Bee hissed under her breath at the sack-of-potatoes cab driver sitting there in all his Rothman-breathed, greasy-haired splendour while she hoisted boxes and boxes of stuff from the back of his estate car. Then she turned to hit Mr Arif, the corpulent and slimy property agent who was grinning at her from the front step, with one of her sweetest smiles – when what she actually wanted to do was put his repellent testicles into a Corby Trouser Press and squeeze them till they popped.

It was one of those days. Wild and woolly. The sky was an intense blue and full of overfed clouds being dragged across the sun by an insistent wind, and it was bitterly, almost sadistically, cold.

Mr Arif sucked in his gut to let her squeeze past in the doorway and smiled at her, lasciviously. Bee nearly gagged on the smell of his liberally applied aftershave.

‘Maybe, Mr Arif,’ she began sweetly, ‘it would be easier if you waited for me in the flat.’

‘Oh yes, Miss Bearhorn, of course. I will await you. Upstairs.’ He backed away, grinning at her as if she was the answer to all his prayers. And in a way, she was. She’d phoned him that morning, asked to see a selection of flats, looked at this one off Baker Street just an hour

after their phone conversation, told him she'd take it, gone back to his office, filled in some paperwork, given him cash for three months' rent in advance and was now moving in a mere four hours after first contacting him. He'd probably never had to do so little for his commission.

It really was a bloody miserable flat but with the meter running on the minicab and John threatening to do something unmentionable in his cat box at any minute, time to find the perfect flat hadn't been a luxury available to her. And, besides, she quite liked the anonymity of the area around Baker Street. The blandness of it. There was no 'scene' in Baker Street, no vibe, just streets of blank-faced mansion blocks full of foreigners and retired people. In her current state of mind, Bee wasn't ready to fall in love with a neighbourhood again. And, anyway, this was only going to be temporary, just six months to get her life back together, make some money, and then she might even buy a place somewhere.

An elderly lady with intricately curled silver hair and a tartan-jacketed Dachshund was waiting outside the lift as Bee made her way up with John in his carrier. She smiled at Bee as she pulled open the metal grille and then down at John.

'Well, well, well,' she said, addressing the cat, 'you're a very handsome young man, aren't you?'

Bee smiled at her warmly. Any friend of John's was a friend of hers.

'What a beautiful creature,' the woman said, 'what d'you call him?'

'John.'

‘John? Goodness. That’s an unusual name for a cat. What type is he?’

Bee stuck a finger between the bars of John’s carrier and played with the fluff on his chest. ‘He’s an English Blue. And he’s the best boy in the world. Aren’t you, my little angel?’ John rubbed himself against her finger, purring loudly.

‘And who’s this?’ Bee asked, addressing the small, bizarrely shaped dog sitting at the old lady’s feet. She didn’t really want to know but thought it only polite, having discussed her own pet in such detail.

‘This is dearest Freddie – named after Freddie Mercury, you know?’

‘Really!’ exclaimed Bee. ‘And, why – er – Freddie Mercury?’

‘He loves Queen, would you believe? He can howl his way through the whole of “Bohemian Rhapsody”.’ She chuckled and eyed her pet affectionately.

Well, thought Bee, you never could tell about people, you really couldn’t.

‘So, dear. Are you moving in today?’

Bee nodded and smiled. ‘Number twenty-seven.’

‘Oh good,’ said the old lady, ‘then we shall be neighbours. I’m at twenty-nine. And it’s about time we had a new young person about the place. There’s too many old people in this block. It’s depressing.’

Bee laughed. ‘I wouldn’t call myself young.’

‘Well, dear – when you get to my age, just about everybody seems young. Alone, are we?’

‘I beg your pardon.’

‘Are you moving in alone?’

‘Fraid so.’

‘Oh well. A beautiful young thing like you, I shouldn’t imagine you’ll be alone for long.’ She squeezed Bee’s arm with one tiny, *crêpey* hand and shuffled into the lift. ‘Anyway. I’d better get on. It was charming to meet you. My name is Amy, by the way. Amy Tilly-Loubelle.’

‘Bee,’ said Bee, feeling for once like her name wasn’t quite so whimsical, ‘Bee Bearhorn.’

‘Well – nice to have met you, Bee – and John. See you around.’

Bee smiled to herself at the old lady’s closing blast of modern lingo and then the lift creaked and clanked and began its snail’s-pace journey back down to the lobby. She walked down the corridor towards number twenty-seven – her new flat.

Mr Arif was sitting on the sofa, going through some paperwork, but stood up abruptly and let his papers fall to the floor when he saw her walk in.

‘Oh, no no no no, madam. No no no.’ He was crossing his hands in front of his chest and shaking his head, quite violently. ‘This is simply not allowed. This animal. It must go. Now.’ He pointed at John as if he were a sewer rat.

‘But – he’s my cat.’

‘Madam. I do not care if he is the cat of the Queen. No animals, of any description, allowed in any of my properties. It must go – now.’

‘But he’s an indoor cat. He’s never been outdoors. He’s fully house-trained, he’s quiet and he doesn’t even moult and . . .’

‘Madam. I have no interest in the personal character-

istics of your animal. All I know is this – it must leave. Now.’

Bee wanted to cry. She wanted to hit Mr Arif. Really hard. In fact, the way she was feeling right now, after the events of last night, she’d really quite like to kill him. With her bare hands. Put her hands around his big squishy neck and squeeze and squeeze and squeeze until he went purple and his eyes started bulging and then . . .

‘Miss Bearhorn. Please. Remove this animal. I cannot give you the keys until this animal is gone.’

He’s not an animal, she wanted to scream, he’s a human being. Bee could feel her temper building, a pounding in her temples, a painful lump in the back of her throat. She took a deep breath.

‘Please. Mr Arif.’ She perched herself on the edge of the sofa. ‘I need time to think. I need . . .’

‘Madam. There is no time to think. These keys remain in my pocket until I can no longer see your animal.’

Bee lost her battle to control her anger. ‘OK. OK, fine!’ She leapt to her feet and grabbed John’s carrier by its handle. ‘Fine. Forget it then. Forget this flat. I don’t like it anyway. I want my money back. Take me to your office and give me my money back.’

Mr Arif smiled at her indulgently. ‘May I draw some points to your attention at this moment, most charming Miss Bearhorn. First of all, the contract is signed and your money is on its way to the bank. It is too late for any form of cancellation. And second of all, are you really wanting to take away all of your possessions when you have just this minute carried them up here? Possibly it would be easier to leave your animal with a friend or family?’

Bee looked around her at the piles of boxes and decided that although she'd be more than happy to sacrifice every penny of the cash she'd given Mr Arif in exchange for a place where John would be welcome, she really couldn't stomach the thought of lugging this stuff all the way back downstairs, with Mr Arif watching her with his smug little raisin-eyes, and then having to find another letting agency and look at another flat and go through this rigmarole all over again. So she took a deep breath and decided to lie.

'OK,' she said, 'no problem, Mr Arif. None at all. You're absolutely right. I'll just make a call and find an alternative home for my – er – animal.'

She pulled her mobile phone from her bag and dialled in a made-up number.

'Hi!' she said breezily, to an unavailable tone, 'it's Bee. Are you around? Cool. I need you to do me a favour. Can I leave John with you? I don't know. For a while. Three months at least. Really? You don't mind? God – thank you. That's brilliant. You're a star. I'll be round in about ten minutes. OK. See you then.'

'All is sorted out?'

'Yes,' she beamed, tucking her mobile phone back into her handbag, 'all is sorted out.'

Outside the block, she agreed to meet Mr Arif at his office later to pick up the keys and then watched his huge arse swinging its way back down the street towards his offices in Chiltern Street. She gave his receding back the finger and stuck out her tongue. 'Fucking tossy wankhead arseknob shitbag *cunt*,' she murmured under her breath, before leaning towards the cab driver, who was waiting im-

patiently for her to unload her last few boxes and pay her fare.

‘Hi!’ she beamed, switching on the charm, ‘there’s been a slight change of plan. I need you to drive around the block a bit with my cat.’

‘You what?’ The fat cab driver looked at her in horror.

‘You heard me,’ she hissed, ‘just take the cat and drive around a bit. I’ll meet you back here in half an hour.’

The driver’s expression softened when Bee forced three tenners into his sweaty hand. ‘There’ll be more where that came from when you bring him back. OK?’

‘Whatever,’ he shrugged, folding up his copy of the *Racing Post*. ‘Whatever.’

She slipped John’s box on to the passenger seat and tickled him under the chin. ‘You be a good boy,’ she whispered into his ear, ‘I’ll see you in half an hour. Be good.’ And then she closed the door and felt tears tickling the back of her throat as she watched the car pull away and her beloved cat disappearing into the early evening London traffic.

She sighed and made her way to a Starbucks, where she sat for a few moments sipping an Earl Grey tea and taking stock of what had happened in the last twenty-four hours. Her life, as she knew it, was over. And all she had to show for it was as much as she could fit into the back of an Astra estate. She had no idea why she’d left her flat, no idea what she was doing moving into this one. It was just a gut reaction, really, to what had happened last night. And in a strange way it felt sort of . . . preordained.

After ten minutes she picked up her bag and headed for Mr Arif’s office. He looked thrilled to see her *sans* cat and

handed over the keys with what seemed to be unbridled joy.

‘And may I wish you many, many, *many* years of contentment in your beautiful new home, most charming Miss Bearhorn. I am sure you will be most happy there.’

Bee took the keys and headed wearily for Bickenhall Mansions, thinking that that was very unlikely indeed.

I

August 2000

Ana's train finally arrived in London, an hour after it was due. She stepped from the train while it was still moving and strode out into the sunshine with relief. The train she'd got on at Exeter, the train on which she'd got a seat, the train in which she'd been perfectly happy, had broken down just outside Bristol. They'd had to walk a quarter of a mile then, to the next station, and the next train had already been full when it arrived, so she'd had to stand the whole way from Bristol to London, with her feet trapped between three very large pieces of somebody else's luggage, while the wind whistled through a stuck window, making tangles of her hair.

Ana sometimes wondered if she was cursed. And then she'd wonder, more seriously, if Bee had got all the good luck in her family and left none for her. If that had been Bee sitting on the train just now, everyone would have fallen over themselves to come to her rescue. That was no exaggeration – men and women alike. If Bee had had to get off a train and trudge for a quarter of a mile through the countryside in a heatwave, someone would have offered to carry her bags. Actually, someone would probably have offered to charter a helicopter for her. But really and truly, the thing about Bee was that she wouldn't have

been on a defective train in the first place – she'd have been on a train that worked. That was the bottom line.

Ana stood briefly in the middle of the concourse at Paddington, while she considered her next move. The midday sun fell in glittering columns through the glass roof, casting a hot chequerboard on to the marble floor. People walked unnaturally fast, as if they'd been put on the wrong setting. Everyone knew where they were going, what they were doing. Except her. She felt like she'd been sucked into the centre of a huge, swirling vortex. There was a line of sweat rolling down between her breasts.

Ana had no idea how she was going to find Bee's flat. She'd never been to London before and had no mental map to work from. She knew it was divided into north, south, east and west and that a river ran through it. She knew that Bee's flat was somewhere near the centre, somewhere in the vicinity of Oxford Street. But that was as far as her knowledge went. She needed an *A-Z*.

She spotted a W. H. Smith's and walked self-consciously across the marble on her new-born-foal legs. That was the thing with being nearly six foot tall: you ended up looking like one of those fashion illustrations – and it was all very well to look like a fashion illustration if you were just a drawing, but it didn't look nearly so good when you were an actual human being. It looked plain freakish. Ana had suddenly sort of *stretched* when she was twelve, quite dramatically. It had been like a special effect in a horror film – you could almost hear the muscles twanging and the bones creaking as her skinny little girl's body shot up six inches in the space of a year, leaving her with the lankiest, knobbliest limbs ever seen in Devon. People kept

telling her that she'd 'fill out' – but she never did. Instead she developed a special way of holding herself, her shoulders hunched forward, her head bowed, curtain-like hair swinging forward to cover her face and a way of dressing – muted colours and flat shoes – in an effort to disguise her height.

Ana looked around her as she walked and realized that women in London looked like newsreaders, or TV presenters, like the sort of women you only ever normally saw on the telly. Their hair was all shiny and dyed interesting shades of blonde and mahogany. They wore tight trousers and strappy dresses and shoes with heels. They had full make-up and all-over tans. Their handbags matched their shoes, their nails were all the same length. They smelled expensive. Even the younger women, the ones in their teens and early twenties, looked somehow *finished*. There were women of all colours and all nationalities, and they all looked fantastically glamorous.

And there were breasts absolutely everywhere – hoisted high in balcony bras, tamed and contoured under tight tops in T-shirt bras, firm and unfettered inside tiny dresses. And nearly all paired up with minuscule bottoms and tiny, taut waists. My God, thought Ana, was having a fabulous pair of breasts a prerequisite in this city? Did they hand them out at Oxford Circus? Ana peered down at the contents of her Lycra top and felt a burn of inadequacy. And then she caught sight of her reflection in the front window of Smith's. Her long, black hair was dirty and tangled, and because she'd left home in such a hurry, the clothes she was wearing had come straight off her bedroom floor – faded black jeans, khaki Lycra top with white

deodorant patches under the arms, nubby old black cardi she'd had since she was a teenager and scuffed brown Hush Puppies – the only pair of shoes she owned, because it was next to impossible to get decent shoes in a size eight.

She thought of her mother's parting words to her as she saw her off at the door that morning: 'If you get any spare time at all while you're in London, go shopping, for God's sake, get yourself some decent clothes. You look like a –' she'd searched around for a sufficiently disparaging description, her face crumpled with the effort '– you look like a . . . *dirty lesbian*.'

Her mother might have had a point, Ana conceded. Maybe she should make more of an effort with her appearance. She looked around the concourse and became aware that the only person who seemed to have made less of an effort to look good than she had was a guy sitting cross-legged against the wall with a sandy-coloured dog and a cardboard sign that said 'I Need Money. Thank You.'

The man who served her in Smith's didn't make any eye contact with Ana, didn't really acknowledge her in any way. In Bideford, in her nearest branch of Smith's, there would have been an attempt at conversation, some inane commentary, a smile. In Bideford Ana would have been expected to give a little of herself back to the assistant, whether she liked it or not, just so as not to be thought rude. She found the lack of interaction pleasantly refreshing.

The Underground map on the back of her newly acquired *A-Z* informed her that it was only two stops to

Baker Street Tube station on the Circle line, and that she wouldn't have to change lines, which came as a great relief to her. She sat, sweating damply on an almost empty Tube for what seemed like only a few seconds and then found her way easily to Bickenhall Street, a short road filled with faintly menacing red brick apartment blocks, seven storeys high.

Bickenhall Mansions came as a complete shock to her. When she'd looked at Bee's address for the first time this morning and seen the word 'mansion', she'd thought, without surprise, that Bee must have been living in some great detached pile of a building, with security gates and a driveway. But these were just flats. She felt all her other expectations about Bee's lifestyle – housekeepers, health spas and charity do's – drop down a notch or two, proportionately.

She perched herself on the stairs in front of the block and nibbled her fingernails nervously, watching the world go by. Tourists; business people; girls in trendy trouser suits; couriers on huge motorbikes. Not an old person in sight. Not like Bideford, where the OAPs outnumbered the youthful by three to one.

'Miss Wills.' She jumped as someone loomed into view and boomed at her. A large hand with fat knuckles and a big gold ring was thrust towards her. She shook it. It was a bit clammy and felt like a squidged-up shammy leather.

'Hello,' she said, getting to her feet and picking up her bag. 'Mr Arif?'

'Well, which other people do you know who might know you by your name in the middle of the street, young lady?'

He laughed, a pantomime laugh, amused by his own humour, and let them into the building. He was quite short and quite wide and had a very large behind. The fabric of his trousers was silky and thin and Ana could clearly see the outline of a pair of unappetizingly small briefs digging into his fleshy buttocks.

He was highly aromatic, and as the doors closed on the coffin-sized lift, Ana was enveloped in a rich and pungent cloud of perfume. The lift clunked loudly as it finally hit the third floor, and Mr Arif pulled open the brass grille to let Ana out. He gestured expansively at front doors as they walked down a broad, dimly lit corridor that smelled faintly of gravy and old mops.

‘These, all my flats – all short term – but all fully rented – 365 days a year. Here. Here and here. Famous London Stage Actress, here. Here – a lord. There – an MP.’

Ana didn’t really have any idea what he was talking about but she nodded politely anyway.

Mr Arif slipped a key from a very large bunch into the lock of flat number twenty-seven, swung open the door and flicked on the light switch.

‘Here all day with the police and such and who knows what on the day that we found her. A bad day. A very bad day. Four days she’d been here. In this heat. You can still smell it.’ He twitched his nostrils and his large moustache quivered. ‘Breathe in deep like so, and the stench – it is still there.’ He jabbed at his throat with the side of his hand to demonstrate exactly where the stench was and began heaving open grimy sash windows at the other end of the room, holding a monogrammed handkerchief over his mouth.

‘How is this, that a woman as beautiful’ – he pointed at a framed poster of Bee on the wall – ‘could be dead and nobody be knowing this thing? How is it that I, her landlord, come to be the one to be finding her? *I am not her friend. I am not her lover. I am not her family. I am her landlord. This – this is not right.*’

He shook his head from side to side for a good twenty seconds, allowing time for the not-rightness of the situation to be fully absorbed, his body language implicitly informing her that in his culture this sort of thing would not be allowed to happen. Ana gently placed her bag on the floor, and stared in wonder at the photo of Bee on the wall, realizing with a jolt that she’d almost forgotten what her sister looked like.

‘So.’ He clapped his hands together and then rubbed them, his flesh squishing together like bread dough. ‘The cleaners are arriving at nine o’clock tomorrow morning. By this time all extraneous matter to be removed. I have famous Royal Ballerina moving in on Saturday morning. All has to be perfect. Your beautiful sister has not left you a very great task. Your beautiful sister has not very many possessions.’ He laughed again, that pantomime laugh, and then stopped abruptly. ‘Here is the inventory. You will be needing this so you are not taking away the property of the – er – property. Unfortunately, Madam, I am not able to leave you with a key, but if you are needing to go outside, the porter knows you are here and will allow you to move freely. And now I leave.’ And he did, shaking her once more briskly and damply by the hand and clip-clopping away down the long corridor in two-tone slip-on shoes.

Ana pulled the door closed behind her and breathed a sigh of relief. She turned and flicked the security lock on the front door and then she stood for a moment or two and stared around her.

So. This was Bee's flat. It wasn't what she'd imagined. She'd imagined brightly painted walls and huge scarlet sofas, Warhol-type prints of Bee on the walls, lava lamps, mirror balls and lots of generally eclectic, groovy, colourful funkiness. She'd imagined that Bee's flat would be an extension of her and her outrageous personality. But mainly, when she'd thought of Bee's flat, she'd imagined it full of people. And, more specifically, she'd imagined it with Bee in it – her red lips parting every few seconds to uncover those big white teeth; her smile carving dimples into her cheeks; her black bobbed hair swinging glossily back and forth. Talking too much. Smoking too much. Laughing like a drain. Being the centre of attention.

Alive.

What surrounded her, instead, was the somewhat dreary, beige, dusty flat of an elderly, widowed gentleman. The walls were papered with a faded but expensive-looking embossed floral design. The furniture was reproduction in dark mahogany and teak. In one corner stood an ornate birdcage filled with junk. The net curtains were yellowing.

She began slowly to walk around. The flat was huge. The ceilings were at least ten foot tall, the rooms extremely large. But in spite of so much space it still seemed oppressive. The buzz of city life floated in through the open windows but was somehow muted, as if the volume had been turned right down.

Nailed to the wall of the hallway was a gold disc in a heavy glass frame. Ana squinted to read the inscription:

‘GROOVIN’ FOR LONDON’ BY BEE BEARHORN.
ELECTROGRAM RECORDS © 1985
PRESENTED TO BEE BEARHORN IN RECOGNITION OF SALES OF
750,000 DISCS

A door on Ana’s right was open, revealing the bathroom. The suite was a pale, minty green with heavy Deco taps of chrome. The floor was grey linoleum, the window dimpled and opaque, surrounding a cobwebbed windmill vent creaking slowly round and round, as if someone had only just left the room. Ana shivered.

Further down the hallway was a closed door with a large cartoon bumble bee pinned on to it. It had a bubble, attached by a wire, coming from its mouth that said ‘Bzzzzzzz’. Bee’s bedroom.

Ana put her hands to the door and felt chilled suddenly, almost as if Bee’s body would still be lying there on her bed where she’d been found three weeks ago, as if the floor would be littered with pills and capsules, the room buzzing with flies. She pushed the door open slowly, her breathing suspended momentarily. The curtains in the room were closed but for a tiny gap of an inch or two letting in a bright slice of daylight that fell across the huge double bed and the wooden floor, dividing the room in two. Shapes loomed out of the overcast shadows at Ana, and there was an odd smell in the room. She put her hand over her mouth and nose and glanced around the room again before reaching around the corner of the door and feeling for a light switch.

She hit the switch, looked around the room and then released a blood-curdling yell when she saw a small woman with a black bob and red lipstick standing in the corner of the room.

It was a cardboard cut-out. Of Bee. Ana put her hand to her galloping heart and slumped against a wall with relief. It was a stupid life-size cardboard cut-out, a promotional thing for ‘Groovin’ for London’. She remembered seeing one in Woolworths back in 1985 when she was only ten years old and the single had just come out, and wishing that she could have one to take home with her. Bee was wearing a black-leather minidress with a huge silver belt draped around her waist and big platform shoes. She had her arms folded across her waist and one finger touching her mouth, and was staring at the camera as if she’d just shagged it. She looked quite ridiculous, and Ana couldn’t help thinking that Bee was probably the only person she knew (apart from her mother) who would have felt comfortable sleeping in the same room as a giant great cardboard cut-out of themselves.

Ana thought back to that afternoon in Woolworths all those years ago, when she’d first seen the cut-out and had realized, probably for the first time, just exactly how famous her sister actually was. She’d blushed when she’d seen it and looked around her to see if anyone had noticed, and she’d had to bite her lip to stop herself shouting out to anyone who’d listen, ‘That’s my sister – *that’s my sister!*’

1985 was one of the most exciting years of Ana’s life – the year that Bee had become famous. She’d signed a huge record deal at the start of the year and was marketed

heavily as the British answer to Madonna, but nobody could have been prepared for the ensuing phenomenon. ‘Groovin’ for London’, a virulently catchy dance song, went straight into the charts at number one and stayed there for five weeks, and suddenly Bee’s face was everywhere. For over a year Ana basked in Bee’s reflected glory. She was the most popular girl at school. Even the older kids knew exactly who she was. She was Bee Bearhorn’s sister. Like – how cool was that? When Bee’s second single failed to make an impact on the charts four months later, Ana’s status as Most Interesting Person in School started to look a bit shaky. And when her third single was released and greeted with critical derision – the general consensus was that it was the most abysmal record of the year – barely grazed the top fifty and then disappeared without trace, Bee Bearhorn came to be seen as just another naff one-hit wonder of the Eighties and Ana’s relationship to her became more of a hindrance than a social advantage. The crueller girls at her school used the disastrous – and very public – disintegration of Bee’s career as fuel to bully Ana, and for the rest of her school-days Ana was commonly known as One-Hit Wonder Wills.

The bedroom Ana now found herself in was vast. It had two large sash windows and an enormous double bed, which had been stripped of all its clothing except for a large piece of what looked like cashmere in electric pink, folded at the foot of the bed. A lime-green feather boa was draped across the bed head and the windows were framed with multicoloured fairy lights. The floorboards were painted sky blue. This was much more the sort of

room Ana had expected Bee to have been living in. Ironic that it should be the room in which she died.

Ana touched the naked mattress first, gently, with her fingertips, before sitting down on it. The bed was soft and saggy and made an odd twanging sound as she sat. She picked up the soft, pink cashmere blanket and brought it to her nose. It smelled a bit musty, with undertones of some grapefruity, appley perfume.

And there, perched on a pillow and much to Ana's surprise, sat William. He was older and more threadbare than Ana remembered him, but it was definitely him – a small, knitted rabbit in blue dungarees, clutching a carrot between his front paws. She'd given him to Bee when she'd told her she was leaving home, age fifteen. Ana had been only four at the time, but she remembered the moment vividly, remembered Bee's lacy, fingerless Madonna gloves and the smell of Anaïs Anaïs when Bee had held her in her arms and told her not to say a word to their mother. She remembered Bee trying to give him back to her, saying, 'I can't take William, he's your favourite,' and herself forcing him back into Bee's hands, as serious as anything. 'No, Be-Be, you have William. I've got Mummy.'

Ana picked him up and looked at him in wonder. Bee had kept William. For twenty years. And not only had she kept him, but she'd kept him on her pillow. Where she slept. He'd been there when she died. He'd seen it all.

'Here, William,' Ana whispered into his velvet-lined ear, 'tell me – whatever happened to Bee Bearhorn?'