

Pamela Evans was born and brought up in Ealing, London. She now lives in Surrey, near to her family and five beautiful grandchildren.

Her previous novels, which include *The Other Side of Happiness*, *Harvest Nights*, *The Tideway Girls*, *Under an Amber Sky* and *When the Boys Come Home*, are also available from Headline.

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WHISPERS IN THE TOWN

Pamela Evans

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Chapter One

It was a cold Saturday afternoon in February 1957 and shafts of winter sunlight poured through the shop window, glinting on the glass sweet jars with a pale, luminous yellow. The sunshine was deceptive, however, and a bitter draught accompanied every customer who entered The Toffee Shop causing the Storey sisters Sal and Ann to shiver, despite several layers of clothing and fur boots. They were both in position behind the counters at either side of the shop, one for confectionery, the other stocked as a tobacconist's.

'Flippin' 'eck, it's nippy out there,' greeted Hilda, who had been a regular customer here for many years and had known the sisters since they were little.

'You're telling us; we get the full blast of it every time anyone comes in,' said Sal, a twenty-one-year-old redhead with lively blue eyes and freckles.

'Bit of a drawback in cold weather, a shop door, ain't it?' cackled the middle-aged woman, who was wearing a brown coat and woollen headscarf with curlers poking out of the front. 'I bet you don't half curse it.'

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‘We do and all,’ admitted Sal lightly, ‘but Mum and Dad would soon be out of business if the door stayed closed during opening hours, wouldn’t they?’

‘That’s a fact. I don’t suppose it opened often enough when the rationing was on. Thank Gawd the hard times seem to be behind us now that more people have jobs and can afford a few luxuries again. Heaven knows we waited long enough,’ the customer said cheerily. ‘Anyway, it’s nice to see the two of you doing your bit behind the counter. You’re good girls to stand in for your mum and dad on a Saturday afternoon so that they can have a break.’

‘There’s nothing good about me,’ responded Ann, who was a brown-eyed brunette like her mother with the same forthright manner. ‘I only do it because there’s no blinkin’ choice.’

Her sister Sal threw her a disapproving look because her remark could give the false impression that she was mean-spirited. Ann could be a bit bolshie at times and she often spoke without thinking but she had a good heart. ‘Take no notice of her, Hilda,’ she said. ‘It’s just her cold feet talking. She doesn’t really mind doing a stint in here, do you, Ann?’

‘She does it – whether she likes it or not – that’s the important thing,’ declared the customer, giving Ann an encouraging smile.

Both sisters had full-time jobs outside of the family business which was in Perry Parade, a row of shops in a working-class residential area on the outskirts of Hammersmith. But it was a tradition in the Storey

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household for the daughters of the family to look after the shop for a few hours on a Saturday afternoon to give their parents some free time together.

Their mother was a stickler for family duty and had brought her daughters up with her own values, at times ramming them home to a tiresome degree. Sal rather enjoyed her stint in the shop as a change from her office job but it wasn't always convenient for either of them and Ann often had a grumble about it.

Now Hilda turned to Sal who was behind the sweet counter. 'Two separate quarters of sherbet lemons for my young 'uns, please, luv. I'll have to have 'em in separate bags if you don't mind or there'll be all-out war when the little perishers share them out.'

'Certainly.' Sal smiled, lifting the jar down from the shelf and transferring the sweets to the scales with a scoop. 'I bet they'll count the actual sweets to make sure they are equal. I know Ann and I used to do that when we were children.'

Hilda let out a raucous laugh. 'Kids eh. They'd count their cornflakes one by one if they could, to make sure one hasn't got more than the other.'

She went on to buy bull's-eyes, pear drops, Storey's home-made toffee and a variety of chocolate bars before moving to the other counter to purchase cigarettes for herself and tobacco for her husband's pipe.

'This little lot should keep 'em happy in our house over the weekend and if it doesn't I'll bang their heads together,' she said, her shopping bag loaded with goodies for her family. 'Thanks girls and ta-ta for now; be good.'

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‘Fat chance we’ll have of being anything else while we’re stuck in here every Saturday afternoon,’ Ann complained after the door had closed behind her.

‘Don’t go on about it, Ann, it’s only a few hours out of the week,’ Sal pointed out. ‘I know it can be a bit of a nuisance if you’ve got other things to do but it’s the least we can do for Mum and Dad.’

‘I don’t see why we should have to do it at all.’

‘You know very well why. It’s because they’ve always been good to us so it’s only right that we should give something back now that we’re adults. The shop supported us until we were old enough to earn our own living, remember.’

‘As if I could forget, the number of times Mum has shoved it down our throats and – all right – I accept that we should do it sometimes; but every week is a bit much, you must admit,’ she said. ‘She only forces us to do it to make a point. Dad doesn’t push it.’

‘He wouldn’t, would he, as Mum’s the boss in our family. Dad does what he’s told the same as we do,’ Sal said. ‘Personally, I think she does a good job in her own way. I know she can be a bit of a nag at times but she does her best for us all, organising the household and running the shop with Dad.’

‘He pulls his weight too,’ Ann said.

‘I know he does but Mum just happens to be the one I am trying to defend at this particular moment.’

‘Dad’s such a sweetheart we never need to defend him anyway,’ Ann came back at her. ‘Quite honestly I don’t

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think he's bothered about having a break on a Saturday afternoon. He just goes along with her so that she won't give him a hard time.'

'Be fair Ann,' reasoned Sal. 'They're entitled to a few hours off at the same time, even if it is only to put their feet up.'

'And I have never said otherwise,' she conceded with an irritated sigh, 'but I've got better things to do with my time this Saturday afternoon than stand behind this flamin' counter.'

'Such as?' queried Sal lightly.

'I want some new shoes with really high stiletto heels. I saw a pair of beauties this morning in the town but I couldn't make my mind up whether to buy them or not. Now I know I want them for definite and I can't go there to get them because I've got to stay here and I want to wear them tonight.'

'Not more shoes, please,' wailed Sal. 'Our wardrobe is overflowing with your footwear and clothes. There's hardly any room for anything of mine.'

'You don't half exaggerate. Just because you've got your man and you're saving up to get married so you can't have any new things, it doesn't mean that the rest of us have to go around looking like frumps. I still have to get out there in the dance halls of a Saturday night in the hope of finding someone.'

'So I'm a frump then, am I?' Sal retorted.

Ann made a face. 'No, of course you're not. Sorry, Sal. I only said that because you rattled me.' She ran a studious

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eye over her sister. ‘Mind you . . . you’re not nearly as smart and up to date as you used to be because you never buy anything new to wear.’

‘It’s a question of priorities. I’d sooner save my money for things for my bottom drawer.’

‘All right, don’t rub it in, that you’re the younger sister with a shiny engagement ring and a wedding planned and I don’t even have a steady boyfriend.’

‘I wasn’t rubbing it in,’ protested Sal who was engaged to her long-term boyfriend Terry Granger, their wedding arranged for the summer of this year. ‘Anyway, you’ve had loads of boyfriends so it isn’t as though you don’t get plenty of chances.’

‘And I let them all slip through my fingers.’

‘I didn’t say that but you don’t stay with any of them for very long, do you?’

‘They get on my nerves after a little while so I have to get rid of them,’ Ann sighed. ‘Maybe it’s because I’ve never found anyone with that something special that everyone goes on about.’

‘Or it could be that you are expecting too much,’ suggested her sister. ‘Blokes are all only human beings. I expect even Tony Curtis and Elvis Presley have their irritating habits.’

‘If I was going out with either of them I’m sure I could put up with any amount of annoyance,’ Ann laughed, making a joke of it. ‘Anyway, I’ve probably missed the boat altogether now at the grand old age of twenty-two.’

‘Now you’re just being ridiculous.’

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‘Maybe I am but nearly all of my friends are married, engaged or courting strong. I’ll have no one to go out hunting with before long. But I’m not prepared to settle for someone who doesn’t give me that special buzz just to get myself off the shelf.’

‘You’ll meet your special man soon, I’m sure.’

‘It would help if I could get those shoes.’

‘Oh come on,’ laughed Sal. ‘Since when did a pair of shoes ever help anyone get a man?’

‘It’s all part of the gear that will make me look irresistible.’ Ann grinned. ‘And it doesn’t need the two of us to be here for the whole of the afternoon, does it? I could easily slip out to get the shoes. I wouldn’t be gone long.’

‘You know how busy it gets later on when everyone comes in for their weekend treats,’ Sal reminded her. ‘I don’t mind you getting the shoes in the least but with the best will in the world I can’t serve on both counters at the same time and Mum will go mad if she gets to hear that people have been kept waiting, which she will do because the customers will be very quick to tell her. You know how fussy she is about the shop’s reputation.’

‘I’ll be back before the rush, I promise,’ claimed Ann. ‘I’ve only got to pop up to King Street. Even allowing for the time I’ll have to wait to get served, this being a Saturday, I won’t be gone for much more than half an hour.’

‘And the rest,’ predicted Sal.

The conversation came to a halt as the door from the

house at the back of the shop opened and their paternal grandmother Dolly came in carrying a tray of tea and biscuits. At her heels was Scamp the family dog, a black and white mongrel with more than a touch of terrier about him, long pointed ears and dark eyes which could be very persuasive when he wanted a bone or a cuddle.

‘Hello Gran, how smashing to see you,’ Ann gushed with a crafty gleam in her eye. ‘What perfect timing!’

‘It’s only tea and biscuits, dear,’ Dolly pointed out.

‘She isn’t talking about the tea and biscuits, Gran. She’s after a favour,’ said Sal with a wry grin. ‘She’s going to ask you to stand in for her here while she goes off to buy shoes.’

‘I’ve seen a pair of stiletto heels I really want. The Italian style that everyone smart is wearing, Gran,’ Ann explained.

‘Yes, I have seen young women wearing them,’ Dolly said. ‘So, how long are you going to be?’

‘Only about half an hour.’

‘Go on then,’ she agreed without hesitation. ‘Off you go.’

‘Oh Gran,’ said Ann, hugging her. ‘You’re the best grandmother anyone could have.’

‘Enough of your old flannel,’ said the older woman with an affectionate smile. ‘I’m not so daft as to fall for it.’ She looked at Ann, who seemed about to dash off. ‘It’s cold outside so go upstairs and get your coat and tell your mother where I am and that I’ll have my tea with Sal down here. Oh, and bring my big cardi down with you please. It feels cold down here away from the fire.’

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‘Will do.’ She hurried through the door to the house followed by the dog, who was probably keen to return to his favourite spot on the rug by the living-room fire.

‘Now Sal, can you turn that heater up a bit please, dear?’ said Dolly, hugging herself against the cold. ‘It’s proper parky in here.’

Sal went to the electric fire at the back of the shop. ‘It’s already on the highest setting, Gran,’ she said. ‘Why don’t you stand close to it while you’re not serving?’

‘I think I shall have to,’ she said. ‘You know what a cold mortal I am.’

Only in terms of body temperature, thought Sal, because she knew of no one with a warmer heart than her grandmother.

Ann didn’t return in half an hour which was no surprise to Sal because her sister was always pushing her luck. But Ann also had many virtues and it wasn’t in Sal’s nature to begrudge her. Anyway, she enjoyed working with her gran who had lived with the family since she was widowed when Sal and Ann were little. Both sisters adored her. She was shrewd, kind and had a keen sense of humour. Now in her sixties, she wasn’t traditionally elderly in appearance and was rather a striking figure, her hair still red though peppered with grey, the freckles she had passed on to Sal now more pronounced with age. She had clear blue eyes, a predilection for bright lipstick and a fondness for a glass or two of stout in the evenings.

‘Is there any more toffee in the stockroom do you

know, Sal?’ she asked now as she checked the counter display to see which items needed to be replenished during the lull, though the shop had been busy until now.

‘No we’re right out of it; we put the last of it out on the counter earlier and that’s all gone now,’ she replied.

‘I shall have to get busy with my pots and pans then, won’t I?’ Dolly made all the toffee for the shop from her own recipe. Storey’s Home-made, as it was known, was their biggest seller, drew people from outside of the area and gave the Storeys an advantage over other confectionery retailers. ‘We can’t have our customers being disappointed, can we?’

‘They can’t get enough of it,’ remarked Sal. ‘It’s everyone’s favourite, including mine.’

‘That’s nice to know,’ said Dolly with a smile. ‘As long as there is still a demand I shall continue to make it.’

The shop door opened and Ann burst in, pink-cheeked and breathless and carrying a paper bag printed with the name of a well-known shoe shop.

‘You got them then,’ observed Sal. ‘Let’s have a look.’

Ann didn’t need a second bidding and out came sheer elegance in the form of black patent shoes with winkle-picker toes and pencil-sharp stilettos.

‘Aren’t they just the loveliest things you’ve ever seen,’ sighed Ann, pushing her feet into them and parading around swinging her hips.

‘They are gorgeous, I must admit,’ agreed Sal. ‘I’d like a pair like that for my going-away outfit.’

‘Are you sure that you can walk in them, Ann dear?’

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asked Dolly with the sort of practical concern more typical of her generation than her granddaughters’.

‘The shoes that I can’t walk in haven’t been invented yet, Gran,’ giggled Ann.

A blast of cold air heralded a flurry of customers, glad to get inside out of the weather. This was the usual last-minute weekend rush before closing time because, in common with most other shops, The Toffee Shop didn’t open on a Sunday. Now the adults were eager for their weekend cigarettes and a crowd of exuberant children were jostling for a position close to the sweet counter, all talking at once.

‘All right, Gran,’ said Ann, hobbling to the other side of the cigarette counter in her new shoes. ‘I’ll take over now.’

‘Okey doke,’ agreed Dolly and headed for the door into the house.

The Storey property was an old, traditional building on three floors with sash windows and stone sills. At ground level was the shop, the stockrooms and a small, basically furnished sitting room for those on duty to take a break. From here there were doors to a small garden with a shabby wooden shed-cum-garage at the bottom. The first floor consisted of a kitchen, sitting room and living room and the top floor had three bedrooms and a bathroom.

It was on the first floor that an argument erupted between Ann and her mother that evening at the meal table.

‘You had no right to go off and leave your grandmother

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helping Sal in the shop,' Joan Storey admonished, her brown eyes bright with anger. 'Especially in this cold weather.'

'Oh not that again,' Ann responded as her mother had already reprimanded her on the subject at length. 'Gran didn't mind standing in for me. She likes working in the shop. I wouldn't have asked her if she didn't.'

'God knows, I ask little enough of you,' Joan carried on as though her daughter hadn't spoken. 'I never ask for help with the domestic chores apart from a little assistance with the dishes now and again. But I do like you to show your appreciation by looking after the shop on a Saturday afternoon.'

Ann emitted an eloquent sigh. 'I know that, Mum, and I'm sorry,' she said dutifully.

'She wasn't gone for long, Mum,' fibbed Sal in her sister's defence. They had their differences and plenty of them but she and Ann were basically devoted and always united against others.

'That isn't the point and I told her that when she came upstairs for her coat before she went.' Joan stared at Ann coldly. 'Your grandmother shouldn't have to fill in for you unless there is an emergency. It's draughty down there and she's an old woman.'

'Hey, steady on, Joan,' objected Dolly. 'I'm still capable of dishing out a few acid drops you know.'

'Please don't side with her, Dolly,' snapped Joan.

'Gran's done nothing wrong,' said Ann, her voice rising angrily. 'So there's no need to speak to her like that. Anyway, she isn't old in her ways. You don't seem to

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think so either when you want her to help *you* in the shop.'

Joan looked about to explode, eyes bulging, plump cheeks strawberry-coloured with rage. 'Horace, speak to your daughter please,' she demanded, glaring at her husband.

'Er . . . I can't actually see the problem in her slipping off for a short time, dear. You could even say it was a tea break,' he said to his wife in his usual mild-mannered way. 'So long as Mum didn't mind, there's no harm done.'

'It's the principle of the thing,' Joan ranted. 'This shop has provided well for us as a family, even if we did have to subsidise our income during the war when you had to work on munitions and everything was so short we couldn't make a decent living from it. The girls have had the best we can give them and now they must make a contribution. It's called family spirit.'

A tall, angular man with gentle blue eyes, his ginger hair beginning to recede and turn white at the edges, Horace heaved a sigh of resignation and turned his attention to Ann.

'So . . . young lady, what was it that was so important you had to go out suddenly?' he asked.

'Shoes,' she replied defiantly, as though daring him to object. 'I needed new shoes so I went to get them.'

'Shoes,' snorted Joan. 'You got your grandmother to stand in for you while you were out buying yourself shoes.'

Watching her sister flush with fury, Sal braced herself for the outburst she knew would come. Explosions

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weren't unusual between Ann and her mother, both being outspoken and hot-tempered.

'Yeah, that's right and if you don't like it you'll just have to lump it.' Ann burst out, surpassing her usual level of disrespect when in a temper. 'I pay you for my keep every Friday when I get my pay packet.' Her eyes were wet with angry tears, cheeks flaming. 'I don't owe you anything so I don't have to spend every Saturday afternoon stuck behind the counter in your rotten shop when I've been out working all week in a flamin' factory office. The shop is yours and Dad's, not mine and Sal's.'

'Well, that's gratitude for you,' huffed Joan, red blotches suffusing her face and neck. 'I'll remember that the next time you are short of money and we help you out with our income from the shop.'

'Do what you like,' said Ann thickly and rushed from the room.

'Don't even think of going after her, any of you,' ordered Joan, giving the three remaining family members a warning look. 'You stay where you are and eat your meal before it goes cold.'

Sal had completely lost her appetite but she dared not leave a morsel of the sausage, beans and chips her mother had cooked so she stayed where she was and the four of them finished the meal in silence.

'It's very disloyal of you to take Ann's side against me, Horace.' Dolly and Sal had made a diplomatic exit after the meal and were in the kitchen washing the dishes

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with the door closed while Joan and Horace went at it hammer and tongs in the other room. 'I am deeply hurt.'

'I didn't deliberately take sides, dear,' he explained. 'It was just that I honestly couldn't see anything so terrible in her going out for a short time.'

'Well I was upset about it so you should have backed me up whether I was right or wrong. It's your duty as my husband,' she said in a strident manner. 'Anyway, you are far too soft with the girls.'

'Maybe I am less vociferous in my approach to them than you are,' he admitted. 'But they know they can only go so far with me. I have my limits.'

'You let them get away with murder.'

'Look, Joan, the fact is that they are both grown women now,' he tried to reason. 'They have their own lives and their own opinions. There isn't much we can do about that.'

'You *are* taking Ann's side.'

'No, not exactly. She was very rude to you and I shall have a few strong words with her about it. But the truth of the matter is that we can't force either of them to work in the shop now that they are adults and paying their way.'

'We shouldn't have to force them,' she snapped. 'They should do it with a willing heart out of gratitude.'

'In a perfect world they would and most of the time they do do it willingly.' Horace sighed. 'But they are young and eager to get on with their own lives outside of us. They didn't ask to be born so they shouldn't have to be grateful to us all the time. It was our job to

do our best for them when they were growing up and we did it out of instinct, not because we wanted anything from them later on. It's what decent parents do. One day when they are married and have children of their own, they will see things differently.'

'Ann doesn't seem to have any respect for me at all.'

'She did overstep the mark just now but I do think that the two of you spark each other off.'

'It's no wonder she never keeps a boyfriend, with a temper like that,' she persisted.

'From what I can work out, it's the other way round,' he said. 'It's her who gives the boyfriends their marching orders.'

'She would say that, wouldn't she?'

'That isn't a nice thing to say about your daughter, Joan,' he said sternly. 'It's a good job I know that you don't mean it.'

'No, I don't mean it,' she admitted, looking sheepish. 'Because she's upset me I don't know what I'm saying.'

'That works both ways,' he said. 'I'm sure she didn't mean any of those horrible things she said to you. Anyway, I shall speak to her about her attitude.'

'I should think so too.' She looked at him and for a moment there was bitterness almost to the point of hatred towards him in her eyes; she was full of resentment and disappointment.

Catching the full force of her sudden contempt, he winced; they stood either side of the fireplace locked in silence as tension unrelated to the current issue rose around them. 'I shall speak to her right away,' he said

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hoarsely. 'And please try and calm down, dear. Don't spoil the weekend for yourself by being miserable. I know how you enjoy Sundays.'

'All these family rows, Horace,' she sighed. 'It didn't used to be like this.'

'It's just the rough and tumble of family life now that we have grown-up children,' he said kindly as though her fleeting moment of malice hadn't happened. 'I doubt if we are any different to any other family. There are bound to be differences of opinion when the children become adults because they have their own views on things. We have lost our influence over them.'

She shrugged her shoulders, looking dejected

'Cheer up, dear. It's a day off for us tomorrow.'

'Mm, there is that I suppose.'

'I'll go and have a word with Ann right away,' he said and headed for the stairs, a knot of anxiety tightening his stomach. He loved his wife dearly but he did wish she would let go of the past and accept things as they were; acknowledge him as he was.

'I've really blown it with Mum this time, haven't I?' said Ann, full of remorse when Sal went to see her in the bedroom they shared as soon as she'd finished helping her grandmother with the dishes.

'You were a bit explosive,' agreed Sal.

'I know. It was awful. I lost my temper completely and the words came pouring out. But Mum gets me to the state where I don't know what I'm saying,' she said. 'She can be very annoying, you must admit.'

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‘Yes I do admit it but she has her standards, especially about the shop.’

‘Does she have to inflict them on the rest of us?’

‘You know what she’s like. But you also know that there isn’t anything she wouldn’t do for her family,’ Sal pointed out. ‘She likes us all to muck in, that’s all.’

Ann sighed heavily. ‘Yeah, I suppose you’re right.’ She put her head in her hands despairingly. ‘Oh dear, all those terrible things I said. So I suppose I shall have to apologise.’

‘And the sooner the better,’ advised Sal. ‘Otherwise there’ll be a terrible atmosphere in the house all weekend.’

‘There was a tap on the door and their father called out. ‘Are you decent in there?’

Ann opened the door to her father and Sal slipped out, leaving them alone to settle their differences. It was time she started getting ready to go out with Terry anyway.

‘I suppose you’ve been sent to give me a trouncing?’ Ann said to her father.

‘I would have come anyway,’ he said in a stern manner. ‘It really isn’t right to speak to your mother the way you did. It was horrible and I was thoroughly ashamed of you.’

‘I’m sorry, Dad,’ she said. ‘I didn’t mean what I said, especially about not owing her anything.’

‘It isn’t me you need to apologise to.’

‘I know,’ she readily agreed. ‘But Mum does treat Sal and me like kids sometimes. She still thinks she can tell us what to do and it makes me so mad.’

‘So what if she is a bit hard on you at times. She’s

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your mother, no matter how old you are, and she deserves respect.'

'Yeah, yeah, I know.'

'Look Ann, your mother is keen on family togetherness and there is nothing wrong with that,' he said in a persuasive manner. 'It doesn't really hurt you to look after the shop on a Saturday afternoon, does it?'

'I only popped out.'

'I'm not only talking about that,' he said gravely. 'I'm talking about your rudeness to your mother just now and your general attitude towards doing anything that doesn't suit you.'

'I'm at work all the week, Dad,' she reminded him. 'I don't have all that much chance to do my own things.'

'I realise that and I shall point this out to your mother but just take it easy on her in future.'

'I'll try.'

'In the meantime I would like you to go and apologise to her right away.'

'OK.'

He turned to leave then looked back into the room. 'And do try and look as though you mean it, dear. She really didn't deserve that tongue-lashing you gave her.'

'All right, Dad,' she said following him from the room, feeling his strength and noticing the upright way he held himself, his back ramrod straight. Dad's personality was something of a paradox. He seemed weak in that he allowed his wife to dictate to him but there was something very strong about him too. There was a sense that he could cope with any emergency that might arise and

that his judgement was never flawed. Mum ruled the roost but he was the backbone of the family; a quiet and wise presence. What would any of them do without him?

Terry was far more interested in the letter he'd received from his older brother Charlie in Australia than the trials and tribulations of the Storey family as related to him by Sal in the pub that evening.

'Charlie is doing really well, Sal,' he said with blatant envy, having handed her some photographs of his brother and his wife standing outside their house in Adelaide beside a smart-looking car. 'He went out there as a welder five years ago and he's a car sales executive now and enjoying the standard of living that goes with it.'

'It does look nice, I must admit,' said Sal, studying the picture. 'Lovely house.'

'I know. It's all possible out there.'

'He seems to have made a go of it anyway,' she agreed.

'It's the land of opportunity,' Terry continued, waxing lyrical as he sipped his beer. He was twenty-three; a tall man with brown curly hair and hazel eyes; not outstandingly good-looking but well set up and presentable. He was a skilled metalworker by trade and like many men who worked in overalls, he took care with his appearance outside the factory and was smartly dressed in a suit and tie in a traditional style. 'All that lovely sunshine and chances to better yourself. No wonder it's got that name.'

'Mm.' Sal was wearing a blue sweater that enhanced the colour of her eyes and a black pencil skirt, her shoulder-length hair worn loose in a simple style similar

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to that of Grace Kelly, 'I have heard people say that sort of thing about Australia.'

'This country is no good at all,' he went on. 'Absolutely finished.'

'I don't agree with you,' she said defensively. 'Things are better now than they have been for years and likely to improve into the future, according to the papers. We have had the war to contend with, remember. It was bound to take a while to get things going again. But goods are plentiful now and there are more jobs around.'

'There's still a terrible housing shortage,' he reminded her. 'And there isn't any scope for ordinary people here, whereas in Australia there is. It's a young country with lots of space and not enough people to fill it which is why they are putting a lot of money into their immigration scheme.'

'I suppose it makes sense.'

'I mean, take me for instance, I'll probably still be slaving away in a factory when I'm sixty-five whereas Charlie will be rolling in dough. By then he'll have a swimming pool in his garden, I reckon. They have the weather for it.'

'Do I detect a note of jealousy?'

'Maybe you do,' he admitted. 'But inspired is more the word I would use.'

'Inspired to do what?'

'Go out there and join him.'

She felt as though she had just hit a wall at high speed. 'You want to go off to Australia and leave me. But . . . we're supposed to be getting married in the summer.'

Pamela Evans

‘You as well, of course, you daft thing,’ he made clear. ‘I want us to emigrate to Australia. Both of us.’

The relief was sweet and the idea exciting. ‘Us go abroad?’ she said with awe.

‘Yeah, why not? Plenty of people are doing it. Ten pounds is all it costs. The Australian government pays the rest because they need people from outside to work in their booming industries and set up home there. The journey takes a few weeks on the boat. So you get a holiday as well. Oh Sal, isn’t it a great thing to do?’

Anywhere abroad was glamorous to her, having never been further than the South Coast. She’d heard about the ten-pound scheme, of course. Ten-Pound Poms they called the people who went to Australia that way. In fact, a woman from work and her husband had emigrated a few years ago. All Sal could think about was sunshine and bright modern housing such as was in the photograph she had just seen. The pictures in her mind were like scenes in a Technicolor film.

‘Yes, it is, Terry,’ she agreed.

‘In fact, it’s more than just an idea, Sal,’ he said, enthusiasm rising with every syllable. ‘I’m serious. I really want us to go.’

‘Hey, slow down. We can’t go just like that,’ she objected. ‘It won’t be that easy.’

‘It can’t be difficult or so many people wouldn’t be doing it,’ he pointed out. ‘I’ve made a few enquiries and the first move is to approach Australia House, apparently. So I’ll go sick one day next week and get all the information from there.’