

*The  
Things You  
Do for Love*

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Also by Rachel Crowther

*The Partridge and the Pelican*

*The  
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Crowther

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*For Clemency, Katie, Toby, Daphne and Rowena  
with love and thanks*



*All the things you do for love –  
Are they the things you do for pleasure?  
All the things you do for love –  
I've got to ask you whether  
All the things you do for love –  
Are they the things you're gonna treasure?*

**Mia van Arlen, 'Tough Love'**





# Prologue

London, May 2014

Face to face with the statue, Kitty felt the air in her lungs turn to stone. Half human and half rampant vegetation, this figure was utterly different from everything else in the exhibition. One hand clasped a staff wound with ivy that snaked up his arm and around his neck; the other held a pitcher overflowing with grapes. Kitty recognised the trappings of Bacchus, a haggard and ramshackle Bacchus, but she recognised something else too in this representation of him. The wild tangle of his hair was dismayingly familiar, but it was his face, the curl of his mouth and the line of his nose and even the trace of a teasing glint in his eyes that triggered such a jolt of disbelief.

As Kitty stared, the noise of the crowded gallery dropped away. Somewhere in the room were her mother and her sister, other people she knew, who should see this, but she couldn't drag her eyes away from the sculpture. The carving was exceptionally delicate, the marks of Alice's chisels and rifflers polished away until the texture of the marble was as smooth as skin, the features all-but alive. Vines spiralled from his shoulders and leaves furred across his chest, but the foliage drew back from the shocking lesion near his heart: a crusting, carbuncular mass that thrust up through the skin and sprawled across the broad ribcage.

Kitty felt the floor lurch beneath her feet, the solid world turning suddenly treacherous. Somewhere in the ether she heard someone say, 'Are you all right? You look terribly pale, can I . . . ?'

At the same time a woman's voice cut shrilly across the buzz of concern.

'Good Lord,' she said, 'it's Henry Jones. Look at Bacchus' face: he's the absolute image of Henry Jones.'





# PART I



## **Greville Auctioneers, Friday 12th December 2014**

### **Paintings and drawings by Nicholas Comyn, from the collection of the late Henry Jones**

#### **Lot no. 1: Family Portrait, 1995**

This sketch represents something of a mystery. Donated anonymously, it is the only work in this sale that does not come from Henry Jones' personal collection. It has the appearance of a preliminary study for a painting, but it is not known whether the finished work was produced before Comyn's untimely death in May 1995.

According to the donor, the family depicted here is Henry Jones and his wife, the surgeon Flora Macintyre, with their two daughters Louisa and Kitty, but the figures are not drawn in sufficient detail to make it possible to identify them. The background is barely sketched in, giving only a vague impression of an interior space in which the four figures stand in a somewhat uncomfortable relationship to each other and to the viewer. The younger child is in her father's arms, while the older one is placed between her parents. The mother's hand rests on her daughter's shoulder, but her face is turned slightly towards a window which can just be seen on the left hand side.

The composition does not appear to be a formal pose, but neither is it entirely naturalistic. The subjects seem almost to be on the move, as if this were a still from a film sequence that has caught them in a brief, artificial moment of proximity and stasis: it begs the question of what might have happened in the moment after this scene was captured. If this were a preliminary study, it might well be one of several needed to shape the artist's conception of the planned work and of his subjects. Nonetheless, it has considerable emotional power.

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Despite the questions surrounding its provenance, this sketch is certainly by Comyn: it bears his signature, and his style is readily detectable in the clean lines and deft shading. Given that the Jones family were on intimate terms with Comyn, it seems likely, too, that they are the subjects. The viewer can draw their own conclusions about the resemblance between these figures and representations of the Joneses in other pictures in this collection.



# 1

## English Channel, May 2014

Leaning over the rail that bounded the grimy strip of deck, Flora watched the miles disappear in a hurtle of grey water past the bows of the ferry. It was the middle of May, and despite the heavy clouds the scent of summer was discernible in the air. Salt spray speckled her face and she could hear the distant squeal of children, raucous and cheerful above the noise of the engine. This was a moment, Flora thought, when she should feel glad to be alive.

But almost in the same instant, it occurred to her that it would be quite possible to manoeuvre herself over the side of the boat and into that churning sea. Quite simple, in fact: it was a short drop to another strip of deck below, and beneath that nothing but water. There was no one else about and she was lithe enough to manage the vault easily. If she wanted to, she could be gone before anyone noticed.

For a few moments Flora stood very still, letting the throb of the engine rise through her body like a thunderous heartbeat. The idea of simply disappearing had never occurred to her before, and it shocked her, but she could see that it would be a logical solution – one logical solution – to the problem posed by her situation. And it could feasibly be passed off as an accident, sparing others the guilt or regret they might otherwise feel obliged to bear. She gripped the rail tightly, feeling a surge of emotion too complex and contrary to disentangle. Grief, fear, exaltation – even amusement, a shred of it, at the pickle she found herself in.

It would take time, people said, to adjust to all that had happened in the last six months. She should give herself time. But it seemed to Flora that it was time itself she couldn't adjust to. The sudden having of time:





the way it stretched before her, empty and expectant and oddly unyielding. It was as if she'd stumbled into one of those echoing Elizabethan galleries where ladies could walk and talk to pass the idle hours. Not the kind of place she was accustomed to, Flora Macintyre the surgeon-mother-wife-authority. The do-er of good, mostly: the do-er, at any rate. What on earth was she to do in this unfamiliar territory?

She was on her way home, just now, after spending a week in Alsace with a well-meaning cousin of Henry's who'd guessed that she had few people to offer her this sort of reprieve after the funeral. That was exactly what the week had provided, Flora thought – a reprieve, but nothing more. She could hardly say how she'd filled it, even. She'd got through it, but it was only a week, and there were hundreds more of them to come. She was only sixty; she might reasonably expect to live another twenty-five years.

She gazed out, marvelling at the emptiness of the horizon. The ferry seemed to be trundling through nothingness: an unrelenting grey stretched in every direction. But then, as she stared, something appeared in the distance – something she couldn't make out at first, but which took shape gradually as a boat. Straining her eyes, she could see it bobbing and swaying in a way that suggested there was no one on board to steer it. A tug, perhaps, that had broken free of its moorings and drifted out to sea.

Her attention was so absorbed that she didn't hear anyone approaching.

'Do you think it'll hit us?'

Flora turned. She recognised the young woman who'd climbed the stairs ahead of her half an hour before, between a pair of blonde children already red-faced with unsatisfied demands. She was alone now, holding a cigarette awkwardly as though she wasn't accustomed to smoking. Like a child pretending, Flora thought, and the image caught her interest.

'Do you think it might?' she asked.





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The woman lifted the cigarette to her lips and sucked at it briefly, blowing the smoke out almost at once.

‘It looks out of control to me,’ she said. A pleasant Scottish accent, mixing consternation and amusement.

They stood side by side, gazing at the approaching tug. Its course veered steadily towards the ferry, as if drawn by the magnetic pull of the larger vessel.

‘They’re not built for collisions, these,’ the woman said. ‘Do you remember one nearly sank a few years ago?’

Flora didn’t remember, but she could be persuaded that she did. She glanced again at her companion – a striking face, she thought, despite the weary lines beneath her eyes. For a moment it seemed possible that this was some younger version of herself, an alter ego conjured from the emptiness of sea and sky to share this drama with her.

The tug was small, but the ferry certainly wasn’t capable of deft avoiding swerves. Any moment, Flora thought, a warning siren would sound and instructions would come over the tannoy. But there was silence, apart from the chug of engines and the whisper of water – as though there were no one else on board, no one but the two of them to witness the unfolding scene. As the tug came inexorably closer, Flora’s mind filled with an exhilarating sense of disbelief: the terror and release of an impending crisis she could do nothing to avert. Like being a passenger on the *Titanic*, she thought, watching the iceberg loom into view.

And then at the last minute, almost in slow motion, the danger receded. The tug seemed intent on its course until it was nearly upon them – until it was lifted by the rush of water down the side of the larger boat, hesitated for a moment with its nose in the air as though appraising the situation, and finally, quietly, ducked away. Nudged aside, Flora thought, by a great metal whale, gently insistent, and too vast to brook dissent.





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As the tug made its giddy escape and the ferry sailed on with majestic indifference, Flora's first thought was that she had been cheated of the thrill of calamity. But her second, insinuating itself before she could stop it, was that she was glad to have survived unscathed. The flame of life, she thought, selfish and indomitable or simply bloody-minded, was not to be extinguished so easily.

'Well,' said the woman. She threw her cigarette over the side of the boat. 'That was exciting.'

Her voice had the same quality of eager flatness you might use to conceal from a child the scale of a crisis narrowly avoided. Flora glanced at her, and she laughed suddenly.

'I really thought it was going to hit us,' she said.

'Yes,' said Flora. 'So did I.'

'A *folie à deux*,' the woman said. 'How funny. What's your reason for courting disaster?'

Caught off balance, Flora smiled. 'I'm not sure how to answer that.'

The woman looked at her with a curiosity Flora found she didn't mind. It was easier with strangers, she thought. There was no obligation to dissemble – and still less to tell the truth.

'Are you travelling alone?' the woman asked.

'Yes.'

'Been on holiday?'

'Not exactly.'

'Oh?'

Her smile banished the shadows around her eyes, and Flora saw that the cigarette and the attempt at raffish gaiety had been misleading: this woman was a provider, well versed in service to others. Even the peculiar circumstances of the last ten minutes couldn't deflect her from making pleasant conversation with a stranger.

'I've retired,' Flora said. 'I'm . . . I have plenty of time to travel now.'

'How lovely. Lucky you.'





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*How lovely*, Flora thought. *Lucky you*. She felt once more the twitch of readjustment that caught at her sleeve several times a day. She was fortunate, that certainly seemed beyond question. She was a member of the last generation who'd be able to retire at sixty. She'd have enough money, even if Henry had left less than she'd expected: her NHS pension was more than adequate. Certainly there were blessings to count as well as losses – and yet; and yet.

As she hesitated, her companion grasped abruptly at the railing.

'Oh dear,' she said. 'That cigarette was a mistake. I thought it might help.'

Flora looked beyond her to the sea. It was rougher than it had been a few minutes before, the waves surging and billowing.

'Serves me right,' the woman said. 'I shouldn't . . .'

She groaned as the boat dipped and lifted, and Flora saw her shoulders tense. She felt a wave of sympathy, and with it a whiff of consolation, the sense that there was some reassurance in suffering among others – but it was followed by something exactly opposite: the familiar surgeon's instinct to distance herself; to rise above sickness and misery.

And then, out of the blue, another thought: Henry was always a bad sailor. Henry would have been out here looking green, too.

Watching this stranger gasp in lungfuls of salty air, Flora was assailed by a dizzying spasm of grief. She stared at the horizon in an attempt to steady herself, but the blankness around her seemed overwhelming now. Nothing to cling on to, she thought; nothing to navigate by. The moment when she'd seen her way clear to clambering over the side of the boat came back to her vividly, and she felt a flash of regret. Might she have done it, if this woman hadn't come along?

'I was never like this before the children,' the woman said. 'I was terribly sick with both of them, and it's as if . . .'

 Her voice trailed off.

'Maybe it'll get better again,' Flora said. Not a Flora thing to say: she despised such platitudes, as a rule. She looked again at her companion, young and healthy despite her current affliction. When they reached





Dover she would rejoin her family and disembark, pink-cheeked with relief. She didn't need the pity of a stranger.

Flora pushed herself back from the rail. Perhaps she'd go and see what the café had to offer, she thought. But then the woman spoke again.

'What did you do?' she asked.

'I beg your pardon?'

'You said you'd retired.' She looked very pale still, the attempt at conversation an effort.

Flora hesitated. 'I was a doctor,' she said. 'A surgeon.'

'Goodness.'

There was usually something more at this point – the story of a relative's operation, or an apologia for full-time motherhood – sometimes a half-hearted display of interest in Flora's field. Perhaps it was only the clutch of nausea that prevented the woman from taking any of these courses, but Flora was grateful, nonetheless.

'I retired in January to look after my husband,' she heard herself saying. 'He died six weeks ago.'

'I'm sorry. And that's why you're . . .'

Flora nodded. Despite the urge to escape, to forget all about the imagined collision and the indignity of seasickness, something held her back. This encounter, the drama of the tug, seemed – oh, a test case, she thought, for what anything might amount to now, for her. Was that mere superstition, a foolish falling-back on signs and coincidence, or was she opening her mind – as she should, as she must – to a different way of doing things: a new kind of life?

'I wonder what I'd do in your position,' the woman said.

'I beg your pardon?' Flora turned sharply. It occurred to her, with a jolt of chagrin, that the woman had been watching her earlier and might have guessed what had been on her mind.

'I don't mean to – but the idea of being able to do anything . . .' Her companion smiled, sheepish now. 'You could turn round and go back to France if you wanted to. I can't imagine that.'





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'No.' Not the right answer, Flora thought. She felt unaccountably shaky; partly with relief, but there was something more painful too.

'I mean, not that I don't want to go home, but . . .'

The younger woman fell silent. Flora remembered the children flanking her an hour before, the patience of her voice. She wished she could think of something to say, but she couldn't. It was surely too late now to acquire the habit of small talk, or the kind of empathy other people seemed to find so easy. Glancing up, she saw that the first streak of land had appeared: the chalky Dover cliffs, symbol of home even to those who'd never seen them before. The other woman looked at her watch.

'I'd better go,' she said. She smiled again – which was more than she deserved, Flora thought. 'It's been nice meeting you.'

Watching her companion disappear through the door to the cabin, Flora felt strangely bereft. It wasn't that she'd wanted to continue the conversation; simply that there had been a connection between the two of them for a little while, and now it was at an end. Perhaps she should expect this, she thought – that every insignificant parting would hurt a little, and every small loss would invoke the larger losses she'd suffered. She remembered, then, saying goodbye to Landon after the funeral, thanking him for his eulogy and feeling, at that moment, a greater grief for his departure than for Henry's death. Remembering that other funeral, of course, and what had come after it, although she'd fought the memory down – and must again, she told herself, as another bewildering tide of emotions rose in her throat. How could she deal at once with the complications of the past and the future? Oh, damn Henry for dying: at least he had understood her. Whatever secrets they'd kept from each other had been outweighed, vastly outweighed, by the comforting certainty that they understood each other, and knew how they fitted together. How was she to explain herself to the world now, when she barely understood herself?





As the Dover cliffs came steadily closer, Flora forced herself to consider her situation. Six months ago she'd been at full stretch as clinician and teacher and researcher. Now here she was, retired as well as widowed; entirely without occupation. It seemed to her suddenly that she'd found herself in this position unwittingly: almost – almost – against her will. Flora the clear-thinker, the maker of rational decisions, outmanoeuvred by Fate in some sleight of hand she was still narrowing her eyes to spot.

She shifted slightly, turning away from the approaching port as she examined this thought. She certainly wouldn't have retired at sixty if Henry hadn't been dying. She might not have done if they'd had a different sort of marriage all those years. She was grateful for those last few months, though. That much was true: she didn't want to come to regret them. But she needed to manage the next bit of life gracefully. She couldn't bear people to look at her with pity – or worse, with that shifty look she'd seen on several faces at the funeral.

And then she heard the echo of the other woman's voice: *You could turn round and go back to France if you wanted.*

It was a mad idea, of course. But she thought about Alice's private view that evening; about seeing her daughters and Landon – quite possibly Landon – and the well-meaning questions she would be asked. She thought about Orchards, half-empty after the furious clearing-out of the last few weeks. She thought about signs and coincidence; about the oppression and the opportunities of free choice; about the flame of life burning stubbornly inside her.

When they arrived at Dover and her fellow passengers joined the crush to get back to their cars, Flora hung back. When the stream of traffic headed out of the port and towards the motorway, Flora circled round, and without thinking very hard about what she was doing, she bought a ticket on the next ferry back to France.



## March 1995

As Flora drives away from the hospital, her mind is full of heroism. Waiting at the traffic lights, then heading out onto the dual carriageway, she relives the hours under the lights, the glint of instruments, the counting in of swabs – all the rites and pageantry of the operating theatre, brought to bear on the body of one ordinary citizen. She conjures up the face of her patient, a young man with a faint tinge of green in the hollows of his cheeks, being coaxed back to consciousness among the reassuring paraphernalia of drips and drains and monitors.

And then she remembers the size of the tumour, the length of gut they had to remove, the bleakness of the prognosis. As the orderly lights of the ring road give way to unlit country lanes, Flora feels the adrenaline ebbing away. There is always this moment, this crunch of reality, when the elation of exercising her craft evaporates and the patient comes back into focus, a person with a life that has been interrupted by medical catastrophe. She never deceives herself about such things, but it's necessary to put them away while you get on with the job, focussing on the gaping abdomen before you.

Flora slows for a difficult corner then picks up speed again, shifting into fourth for the straight run along to the final crossroads. But, she tells herself, it's the person who wakes up in the recovery room, whom she'll see tomorrow morning on the ward, that she's made a difference to. She has done what she can to help him beat the odds. She thinks again of the hours of concentration and the expertise of her team: five hours multiplied by five, six, seven people. It's more than going through the motions, surgery. It's always more than that; always a battle fought to the last ditch. This afternoon they halted two hours in, wondering whether to abandon the resection, but they were right to go on. There are always the cases that turn out better than you dare expect, she tells herself, as well as those who do worse.



The village is quiet this evening, but the lights are on in the house, and a cheerful glow filters through the curtains as she turns into the drive. Flora thinks of Henry and the girls inside, cooking supper or watching television or finishing homework.

But in the moment between turning off the engine and opening the car door, the complications of home creep back into her mind: an almost tangible shift from comforting allegory to untidy reality. She recalls last night's row, left hanging this morning, and her earnest assurance to the children that she'd be home early tonight. It's her birthday, she remembers. They promised her a cake. She glances at the clock on the dashboard – it's almost nine. Will Kitty still be up? Will Lou be sulking by now?

There's no one around when she opens the door, just a hushed murmur of voices which she takes for the television. But in a moment Lou rushes down the stairs and throws herself against her chest.

'Mummy! You're back!'

Lou is twelve, and not much given to throwing herself at her mother anymore. Holding her tight for a moment, Flora can feel her small heart thudding.

'I'm so sorry I'm late,' she says. 'I really meant not to be, today of all days.'

'It's OK,' Lou says. 'We've got . . .' She draws away now a little awkwardly, as though she's not sure how she found herself plastered against her mother. 'Daddy's in the kitchen,' she says. 'I was on look-out.'

Flora catches a note of something – warning? – in Lou's voice. Her eyes sweep round the hall, halting for a moment on the portrait of her husband that hangs at the bottom of the stairs: a handsome boy of nineteen, drawn by his friend Nicholas Comyn during a tour of Italy, smiling at the world in the assurance of a warm reception.

'Is Kitty still up?' she asks – but before Lou can answer, Henry appears from the kitchen, carrying a bottle of champagne and some glasses on a tray. Henry resplendent in silk shirt and cravat, every





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inch the elegant host, the eminent critic, the reassuring Radio Three voice-over.

‘Darling,’ he says, ‘Happy Birthday. Has Lou . . .?’

He leans forward to kiss her, swinging the tray to the side so he can get close enough to reach her lips. Last night’s row hovers between them, less easy to dodge than the tray. Flora can smell wine on his breath, and can detect it, too, in the flush across his cheekbones. The soft skin there is a reliable barometer for excess consumption of several kinds.

‘Sorry I’m late,’ she says. ‘Unavoidably detained at the operating table.’

‘You’re here now,’ he says. ‘Let me pour you a drink.’

Flora’s eyes are caught now by another picture, another Comyn, of Kitty and Lou on the beach last summer. Something about it lights a fuse inside her: the image of happy family life. The same image she almost allowed herself to believe in a few minutes ago. She’s been fobbed off too often with a glass of wine, she tells herself. She glances towards Lou, but Lou has vanished again. She’s become an expert at vanishing, Flora thinks, with a flash of pain.

‘Wait,’ she says, as Henry moves towards the sitting room door. ‘We need to talk.’

Henry halts, but he doesn’t turn to face her. ‘Not now,’ he says, his voice almost jovial.

‘Why not?’ Anger has flared more quickly than usual, provoked by the way Henry’s dress and demeanour speak of an evening of celebration, and by her guilt about Lou. By the too-familiar chain of complication and compromise. The last vestiges of surgical adrenaline urge her on. ‘It’s always “not now”,’ she says. ‘Perhaps this is the moment, Henry. We can’t simply –’ She raises a fist, half-clenched – not as a threat, not exactly, but as evidence of her strength of feeling, her seriousness of intent.

And then the sitting room door bursts open. The murmur of voices swells suddenly and Kitty flies towards her, pink tutu fluttering, full of





the wildness of a not-quite-three-year-old allowed to stay up beyond her bedtime.

‘We’ve got a party for you!’ she shouts.

The room behind her is full of people, looking nervously, smilingly, in Flora’s direction. The smell of festivity is unmistakable: wine and perfume and the pepperiness of hot breath billow out into the hall.

Caught in the dismay of an ill-timed surprise, Flora can’t muster the appropriate response. Memories of her mother’s parties swim into her mind, and she feels suddenly very tired. Henry looks at her, raises an eyebrow infinitesimally, and then he goes on into the sitting room, and there is nothing for it but to follow him.

‘What a nice surprise,’ Flora says.

The guests – mainly from the village: not many of them friends, to be honest – are clearly embarrassed by the anticlimax, after keeping quiet for so long. They glance at Flora as though they know they should be pleased that their hostess is here at last, but are not sure they are. Why on earth has Henry invited them? To create a party, she thinks. A diversion. Because it would be hard to muster a houseful of people, otherwise, with whom they could go through the motions. Goddammit: and it’s she who looks ungracious now. Heartless, even. Well, she’ll show them. She scoops Kitty up and swings her round, kissing her hot little face.

‘My darling,’ she says, ‘how beautiful you look.’

‘You haven’t got your party clothes on,’ says Kitty. ‘Have you been in the hospital all the time?’

‘All the time.’ Flora settles Kitty on her hip and turns away from Henry, who is coming towards her with a glass of champagne. ‘All this long time. Now, Kitty, come and help me say hello to everyone.’

Flora hears the phone ringing, but for once it doesn’t call her to attention. She’s talking to a feisty octogenarian who lives opposite the church, but she hears Lou answering the phone and registers a flicker of pride at her daughter’s self-assurance as she says yes, and who is it,





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and hang on a moment. Then she sees Lou coming towards her – and there, belatedly, is the catch in her chest.

She takes the call in the kitchen. It's Paul Briggs, her Registrar. In the instant before he speaks she glances at the clock and calculates the possibilities.

'We need you to come back in,' Paul says, his voice deadpan as always. 'We need to take him back to theatre. Cal Nevitt's getting him prepped right now.'

Lou is hovering beside her, and when she's put the phone down Flora pulls her in close. She smells of apples and milk, a little girl scent still, without the pungency of adolescence. Flora shuts her eyes, extending the moment as long as she dares. But when she opens them again the party, the noise and colour and warmth of it, looks like a film, something happening at one remove.

'I have to go, darling,' she says. 'I'm so sorry. The lovely party and everything.'

Lou takes Flora's hand and squeezes it, and then she lifts it away from her shoulder, gently, as though prising a toy out of her mother's grasp. 'I'll tell Daddy,' she says. 'I'll tell him you won't be back till late.'

'Not too late, I hope,' Flora says, but she knows it'll be hours before she's home again. She knows that Lou knows, too. She hesitates a moment, thinking of the party guests, the flush in Henry's cheeks, her fist stalled in mid-air.

'I'll go out the back way,' she says, 'so I don't cause any fuss.'

She kisses Lou, thinks of Kitty, hesitates again.

'Will you put Kitty to bed?' she asks. 'I really can't . . .'

'I'll tell her it was a murgency,' says Lou, employing Kitty's word to make her mother smile.

Flora feels tears pricking then, not so much at Lou's competence as at the need for it; the need for a twelve-year-old to smooth things over for her parents. She wants to say she'll make it up to her, wants to believe she'll have the chance.



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Her car keys are still in her pocket. Once the door is shut behind her she runs round the side of the house and slides into the driving seat. The last waft of merriment from the party trails behind her as she backs out of the drive and heads away up the lane.

## 2

Leaning against the wall in the far corner of the gallery, Lou shut her eyes as another wave of nausea flooded through her. The air was thick with stale breath and perfume: she longed for an open window, for a glass of water, for her bed. Where was Kitty, she wondered, and Flora? Where was Alice, for that matter? She could see Alice's sculptures dotted around the room, but she hadn't paid proper attention to them yet, and she certainly hadn't given more than a glance to any of the other artists' work.

A waft of spiced oil reached her nose, and Lou made a soft crooning sound, something between a moan and a murmur of regret. This upheaval in her body seemed too violent for the cause – the few cells multiplying hopefully inside her. These should surely be the symptoms of something malign, aggressive, heart-stopping: something like the cancer that had killed her father, not the foetus conceived, with what now seemed such distasteful timing, two weeks before he died. She had hardly acknowledged the existence of that tiny creature yet, and this was absolutely the wrong moment for it to make its presence so compellingly felt.

Lou forced herself to survey the room, a cavernous space dense with people. The banner strung along the opposite wall matched the one outside, across the portico of the Taelwyn Gallery. The distinctive font trumpeted style and consequence: *Morris Prize 2014*, it said, and in smaller letters below, *Open daily 10-6, 17th May – 21st June*. Lou registered a flicker of the pride she'd felt when Alice was shortlisted, tempered now by something less straightforward. She scanned the crowd again for her mother and her sister, but there were only the faces of strangers, blurring into each other. The noise was considerable; the particular social pitch, Lou thought, of bohemian privilege, or artistic aspiration, or whatever phrase her father would



have found to parody the occasion. And of course he at least – Henry Jones, music critic and man of letters – always did have more understanding of what was on display than the throngs of hangers-on in Armani and Missoni, even if his daughters did not.

Henry would have loved this evening, Lou thought. He would have loved his connection to Alice, his family gathered in public, his worlds converging. He'd have been pleased about the baby too, she thought, and tears rose in her eyes which she resisted furiously. Tears for her father were too complicated this evening. Too complicated altogether.

'Hello,' said a voice she didn't recognise, and she looked up to see a face she did, vaguely. A friend of Alice's: a very tall girl in her early twenties, wearing something that looked as though she'd made it herself, and wasn't entirely sure about it now she'd got it on in a public place.

'Hello,' Lou said – and then, because she could see that the girl couldn't remember her name either, and a few words of conversation seemed necessary, 'Lou Jones. Alice's partner.'

'Nerissa Stapleton,' said the girl, and she smiled and twitched at one of the drapes of fabric trailing from her waist.

'Great dress,' Lou said. She glanced down at her own black suit, unadorned by so much as a colourful scarf, and wondered if she should have made more of an effort.

'Alice's collection is fabulous,' Nerissa said. 'I love her work. Do you model for her?'

'No,' said Lou.

It was barely eight o'clock. There was still an hour to go before the results were announced, and whether or not Alice won Lou knew they'd have to stay for a respectable time after that, accepting congratulations or offering them, listening while artists and critics and dealers discussed the judges' decision. Two hours, perhaps. Could she survive that long? Her mind skipped ahead, bargaining with probability. If they left by ten – ten thirty – ten forty-five . . . If the traffic wasn't too bad . . .





## THE THINGS YOU DO FOR LOVE

The expectant expression on Nerissa's face was beginning to give way to doubt. Even the bare minimum of social interaction was going to be a challenge tonight, Lou realised. It was the strangest sensation, every word and every thought having the same effect as the pitch and yaw of an aeroplane riding through a storm.

'You'll have to excuse me,' she said. 'I'm not feeling very well.'

She managed something she hoped would pass for a smile, and made a dash for the door.

The irony was that for the last few weeks she'd felt so well, so much the same as ever, that she'd wondered, once or twice, if the pregnancy test had been wrong. She'd almost wished for a sign to reassure her. And now she'd got it, she thought, as she slammed the loo door behind her and bent over the bowl with a groan of relief. How on earth did people keep pregnancies hidden?

When the retching finally subsided, Lou was conscious in its wake of a tangled, guilty sort of grief. Pressing her palms against the marble tiles, she wished fervently that she'd told Alice about the pregnancy sooner; certainly before risking exposure on such a public occasion. She should never have gone ahead without her, she thought: she should have waited until Alice's misgivings, whatever they were, had receded.

They'd gone through the preliminaries together, earlier in the year – the strange formality of registering with the clinic and the comedic evenings spent poring over the catalogue of potential donors – but then Alice had got cold feet, hadn't even wanted to talk about it anymore, and between Henry's decline and the build-up to the Morris Prize the subject had faded from view. But not from Lou's mind. In the end, almost on the spur of the moment, she'd gone back to the clinic alone. As her father lay dying, the idea of bringing new life into the world had possessed her: no, that wasn't quite true. Nor was it true that her cool legal mind had reckoned up the pros and cons, the chances of success on the first attempt, the likelihood that Alice would see things differently once the deed was done. Lou was by no means sure of that





now. It was as if the unquestioning correspondence between the two of them had been unsettled; as if more had changed in Lou herself than that clump of cells deep in her belly.

Hauling herself up at last, Lou stood for a few moments in front of the sink, scrutinising herself in the mirror. She looked pale, her dark hair hanging flat against her face. Not much like a guest of honour at a glamorous reception, she thought, not that she gave a fig about that. There were plenty of people out there to glitter and twitter, glancing over their shoulders to see who was watching, who was listening. Even from her corner, she'd heard the *Art Today* article about the shortlist quoted several times, along with opinions about this being the year for peace not violence, for a return to conventional modes of representation, for work that reflected the global financial crisis. She attempted a smile in the mirror, and heard an echo of her father's voice. Hang in there, it said. Too bad you can't smoke at these things anymore.

Lou made her way back towards the gallery more steadily than she had left it. It seemed vital now to find Alice while the need to confide was still urgent and before nausea overtook her again. As she pushed open the door, the noise of chatter and laughter burst out at her: across the room, she heard a shrill exclamation, and some trick of the mind shaped the words into the sound of her father's name. Lou stopped. So many people, she thought. But as she searched the crowd, there, miraculously, mysteriously, was Alice, coming towards her. Alice unusually elegant in her green silk trousers and long jacket, but still her Alice, solid and comforting, more familiar these days than Lou's own reflection.

For a few seconds Lou's sense of relief was so strong that she didn't register Alice's expression, nor wonder at the coincidence of her approach. She swayed slightly, grasping at the wall again to counter a moment of giddiness, and lifted her eyes to meet Alice's gaze. But before she could speak, before they were close enough to touch, Alice began talking instead.





## THE THINGS YOU DO FOR LOVE

‘My darling,’ she said. ‘I need to show you something. I should have told you about it, but I didn’t. I’m sorry; I was very wrong.’

Someone had found Kitty a chair and a glass of water, while news of her reaction to the Bacchus statue spread in murmured ripples around her. As the first shock receded, Kitty felt several different things at once: embarrassment about the scene she’d made, and grief, and anger too, of course – but it wasn’t entirely clear to her who she was angry with, or what about. A feeling that was hard to explain, but which was strangely familiar to Kitty.

She’d thought the Morris Prize show would be a pleasant diversion; that art and sophisticated company and free champagne were just what she needed. The last thing she’d expected was to have her father thrust forcibly back into view, and in a way that managed to capture both his less admirable side – the bit Kitty was trying hard to forget – and his pathetic vulnerability at the end. Surely she should be angry with Alice, then, for doing this without telling them – certainly without telling Kitty?

Alice had talked a lot, for her, about this collection. It had been a welcome distraction during those awful weekends before Henry died, when they’d all drifted around Orchards like ghosts. Henry had been intrigued by Alice’s sketches and the photos of sculptures in progress – a special concession, that, because Alice was usually so reticent about her work. They’d all been grateful for the pleasure it had given him.

Kitty had thought she knew what to expect this evening, anyway. The collection was called *Neomythia*. Alice called the pieces exposés of myth, by which she meant exposés of what happened to women in myth. Greek and Roman artists, she said, presented the victims of rape without regard for their suffering. She showed them photographs: Leda resting an arm on the sinuous body of the swan while lifting her cloak compliantly; Danae reclining on a couch with breasts casually bared, gazing up at Zeus’s shower of golden confetti; Europa kneeling





provocatively on the back of the bull. What message did that send to male aggressors down the centuries, she'd demanded? Henry, frail and shrunk by now, had smiled in a way that conveyed both admiration for Alice's protest and a pang of regret for the passing of his own days as a red-blooded male.

And now here they were, Alice's portrayals of female bodies deformed and degraded by assault: women cowering beneath giant wings, strangled by snakes and stoned by meteorites. Beside the video screens and fussy assemblages of the other finalists, they looked majestic and magnificent. Kitty had wandered from one to the other with a pleasing sense of understanding and of association. She was Alice's sister-in-law, a woman signed up to the fight against oppression. Surely Alice would win, and they would all have something to celebrate at last after the long months of illness and death.

Then she'd come upon Alice's final piece. Audacious, the people around her were saying, to include it. A male figure, withered and alone, rendered with the same sensitivity as the tyrannised women. A defeated Bacchus, his breast ravaged by a pestilence that no intoxication, no wild hope nor creative force could cure. Kitty shuddered, remembering the moment of recognition, the sudden shaft of understanding. A dying *roué* with the face and hair and thickset torso of her father.

The gaggle of well-wishers around her was drifting away now to other encounters and conversations. Fragments of laughter rose like spray from the sea of chatter, darting briefly towards the high ceiling before falling back to be lost amid the babble. She was all alone, Kitty thought suddenly. Where was Lou? Where was Flora? She looked towards the door, towards the table stacked with bottles and glasses, towards Bacchus on his plinth. And then, as someone shifted in the crowd, she saw Alice leading Lou towards him.

'Oh dear,' she said aloud, although there was no one to hear her. 'I don't think Lou knows. I don't think Alice has told her.'

\*





## THE THINGS YOU DO FOR LOVE

Lou saw her sister's face an instant before her father's. Kitty looked almost as white as the Carrara marble Alice liked best to work with, but Lou had only a fleeting impression of her sister's expression before the statue snatched her attention away.

'I'm sorry,' Alice said – or at least, Lou assumed that was what she was saying. For a few moments, as she stared at the statue, she could hear nothing but the clang of recognition.

'It's a good likeness,' she said eventually. Other words revolved in her mind, lots of different words, but none of them reached her tongue. She looked from the sculpture to Alice, then to Kitty.

'A bit of a shock,' Kitty said. 'Hadn't you seen it?'

Lou shook her head. She wondered how – when – Alice had worked on the piece. Had she studied Henry's features during those weekend visits before he died? Or found some photographs, perhaps?

'Have you seen Flora?' Kitty asked now.

'No.'

Lou put a hand on Kitty's shoulder. She could feel her sister trembling: both of them, she thought, ridiculously undone by the old devil's death – or by his unexpected reappearance. She wondered whether Kitty was thinking, as she was, of that other portrait of Henry, Nicholas Comyn's sketch of him as a young man, which hung in the hall at Orchards. It was partly the resemblance to that which was so disconcerting. The resemblance and the difference – and the uncharacteristic callousness of what Alice had done. Although it was more complicated than that. The tenderness of the portrait hurt almost as much as the criticism implied by representing her father as the libertine Bacchus.

'I'm so sorry,' Alice said again, and it was clear that she was: even sorrier than she needed to be, Lou thought. Henry would have been delighted. He'd have taken the whole thing in his stride in the name of art. He'd always been strangely immune to suffering. But Kitty wasn't; Kitty looked shattered.





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As she cast about for something to say, Lou's phone buzzed in her pocket. Kitty reached for hers at the same moment.

'Mum.' Kitty stared at the screen. 'She's not coming. She's staying in France.'

Lou felt something echoing down the years: a particular, guarded kind of disappointment. 'With the cousin?' she asked.

'No – Calais, it says. She must have started for home then changed her mind.'

Lou's eyes rested for a moment on her sister. Kitty was dressed tonight in garishly mismatched layers, her long glass earrings catching the light as she moved. They looked nothing like each other, Kitty's pre-Raphaelite prettiness and peach-skin complexion a stark contrast to Lou's neat features and Italianate colouring – and they were separated, too, by nine years and a whole spectrum of choices and characteristics. But just now, it was the connection between them that struck Lou. Flesh and blood, she thought; and then she thought of the creature inside her, the chain link of generation to generation, and love and grief and distress welled up inside her.

Kitty's eyes were on her too, her expression uncertain. She glanced again at the sculpture. 'I don't . . .' she began – but she was interrupted by an exclamation behind her. A familiar voice, followed almost at once by a familiar face.

'Good Lord,' it said. 'It really is him, isn't it?'

'Landon!'

Kitty's face filled with surprise and pleasure. And relief, Lou thought, feeling, herself, a twist of something more complicated. The present and the absent, she thought. Making do with what you had: that had always been a feature of their lives, hadn't it?

'Hello, dear ladies,' Landon said. His eyes rested on each of them in turn, judging his response. He knew them well enough, Lou thought, to understand that there wasn't to be a scene.

'How are you?' he asked. 'Where's your mother?'





## THE THINGS YOU DO FOR LOVE

‘In France still,’ said Kitty. ‘She’s decided to stay a bit longer. I didn’t know you were coming, Landon. Do you know Alice?’

Lou turned, her eyes meeting Alice’s briefly. They’d met at Henry’s funeral, but . . .

‘Alice Zellner,’ she said, ‘Landon Peverell. Landon is – was – Henry’s oldest friend. He’s –’

‘I know who Landon is,’ Alice said. She looked straight at him in the way she did with new people; the way Lou found, at different times, admirable or endearing or a little embarrassing. Not unlike the way a blind person might trace a stranger’s features with their fingers, storing them away for future reference. ‘I heard you sing at the Proms once,’ she said. ‘The Mozart Requiem.’

‘And of course I can return the compliment.’ Landon smiled. ‘Congratulations: it’s an impressive collection. Very powerful, the Bacchus. The – tumour.’

‘Breast cancer,’ said Lou. Her voice shook a little, perhaps not enough for anyone else to hear it. ‘You know that, of course. Henry died of breast cancer.’





## November 1977

Flora stands on the landing, looking down into the hall. She feels nothing like a junior doctor tonight, an aspiring surgeon whom her colleagues are fast learning not to underestimate. She feels like Scarlett O'Hara, like Elizabeth Bennet, like Juliet Capulet. She has always been told she is pretty, even beautiful, and for the first time she's glad of it. She's wearing a new dress and has dried her short hair carefully, so that it looks sleeker and more stylish than usual. When she hears the doorbell she takes a step backward, counting to three before she starts down the stairs.

Henry looks rumpled, as he did the last time she saw him. As he always does, she will soon learn. His clothes are well cut, but casually worn and rarely pressed.

'Hello,' he says, with a smile that seems to convey a multitude of other things – to acknowledge what cannot be said in her parents' house. 'Are you ready?'

Another thing Flora hasn't quite understood yet, but which undoubtedly contributes to her electric state of anticipation: her defences have never been challenged, as far as men are concerned. The men she deals with day by day at the hospital treat her with care, like an unfamiliar and possibly dangerous animal. It's clear to Flora that a certain vigilance is required on both sides to keep at bay the prejudice and fear lurking below the surface of professional courtesy, but she is quite happy with this state of affairs. The men whom her mother invites to parties to tempt her with are a different species, requiring no vigilance of any kind.

Her mother doesn't so much disapprove of Flora's career as ignore it: she treats it as a phase Flora will grow out of. She gets on, undaunted, with finding her a suitable husband, and Flora pays as little attention as she can. But the irony – one of many ironies in their relationship, as she will realise in due course – is that Flora met Henry as a result





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of her mother's implacable social engineering. Henry was brought to one of Diana Macintyre's famous parties by Landon Peverell. Diana has always regarded Landon – the son of her oldest friend – as a diverting addition to her soirées, and if he isn't quite the pinnacle of her aspirations for her daughter, the fact that they have known each other since babyhood means there's little risk that he'll distract Flora from the reliable young men from Lloyd's and Cazenove and Hoare Govett. Men like Derek Nicolson, whose engagement to her sister Jean – two years younger than Flora, and suitably equipped with a nannying qualification – has just been announced in *The Telegraph*.

Friends of Landon's are usually welcome at Diana's parties, but Flora could tell at once that her mother disapproved of Henry. He seemed to Flora very much like the rest – his clothes and his manner and his accent indistinguishable from those of the favoured candidates for her hand – but some antenna of her mother's was piqued, and it was this (another irony) that made Flora look twice at him.

'This is Henry Jones,' Landon said, 'we were at university together,' and Flora smiled in a way she rarely smiled, especially at men.

'*Enchanté*,' said Henry, perfectly poised between sincerity and self-parody. 'I've heard all about you, of course.'

For the next few hours Flora played along with his flirtation, embroiling herself in a game of tease whose complexity she underestimated. When he said goodbye at the end of the evening she felt a revelation come over her like a physical change. Lying in bed that night, she traced the outline of his face in her mind's eye, straining her memory for his tone of voice and the twist of his smile. The next day at the hospital she wasn't just distracted, but well-nigh oblivious to the patients in front of her, the bodies laid bare on the operating table. She'd had no practice; built up no immunity. She was like a Pacific island encountering measles for the first time.

'Henry Jones telephoned,' her mother said, when she got home the next evening.





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Flora nodded, revealing nothing. Glancing at the hall table, she could see there was no phone number beside Henry's name on the message pad, but she knew he would call again.

'I thought we'd go to Rules,' Henry says, when they are in the taxi.

'Lovely,' says Flora. She has no idea what Rules is, but the name conjures something grown up and expensive. She's conscious of the lingering scent of surgical scrub on her hands, despite the overlay of bath salts. Forever afterwards, anticipation will smell to her of iodine and lavender.

Rules is grown up and expensive, but it's also splendidly old-fashioned, with a menu full of game and potted shrimps. They sit in a corner, beneath a row of hunting prints. Henry orders champagne and oysters, their flesh and serum texture steeped in sexual allusion and giddily redolent, too, of the body cavities Flora is familiar with.

'Here's to us,' Henry says, as she lifts the first oyster to her lips, and she smiles at him and swallows, a woman who can handle anything.

