

ELLE SAT AT the kitchen table, reading the week-old newspaper and sipping a cup of tea, glad to be out of the cold, but still shaking at the injustice of the day she'd had. Absolutely no jobs yet again in the *Evening Standard*. She'd missed it last week; it had been sold out, and even if she'd had it a week ago it'd have been useless, unless she wanted to go into local government or work for a magazine called *Red Knave*, and she was sure she didn't.

Washing-up was piled high in the sink. They'd had people round the night before; Alex had made pasta and a bong, and Karen had made everyone sing 'Total Eclipse of the Heart' into wooden spoons. Elle had wanted to go to bed early to prepare for her interview, but she couldn't really get out her duvet and lie on the sofa while five other people were glugging Bulgarian white wine out of a screwtop bottle and yelling about the upcoming election.

Elle knew she should do the washing-up in a minute; perhaps then Alex would stop glaring at her when he came in and saying, 'Oh. Hi.' Which meant, 'Oh. You're still here, blighting my life.' She didn't like Alex much, all he seemed to do was show off his new mobile phone and take calls on

it, then play *Tomb Raider* all weekend in the sitting room with his friend Fred. Elle had snogged Fred only the week before, more because she'd been trying to get to sleep and it seemed easier to snog him and then let them get on with playing *Tomb Raider* than tell them to leave. Plus Fred was actually an OK snog, even if she didn't have much to say to him. He'd been there yesterday too – but he'd been in a funny mood, and she wasn't sure he was interested any more, which wouldn't be a surprise, to be honest. He had a job and a flatshare, he wasn't sleeping in someone's sitting room and reading week-old newspapers.

Elle took another sip of tea, and turned from the out-of-date Jobs section to the news pages, cravenly aware this was a waste of time. There was a picture of Tony Blair, meeting some old ladies, and smiling. He looked young and tanned, and his hair was pretty good. Elle couldn't help thinking that was a plus point, not that it should matter but somehow it added to the overall romantic-lead sheen of him. Tony Blair always made her think of that line in *Pride and Prejudice* when Jane asks Lizzy how long she has loved Mr Darcy for, and Lizzy replies, 'It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley.'

Thinking of this now made her smile weakly. She closed her eyes and thought about Lizzy Bennet and Mr Darcy, wondering how they'd talk to each other after they were married and living at Pemberley. Because that always bothered her, what happened after the couple got over their misunderstandings to live happily ever after. She couldn't help thinking Mr Darcy wouldn't be sympathetic if Elizabeth ordered the wrong dinner service when a duke came to stay. She had seen what had happened with her parents, how vicious it had been, and Elle couldn't ever imagine that they'd once been in love.

John and Mandana had been divorced for seven years. Sometimes it seemed ages ago, sometimes she could still remember, as if it were yesterday, their old, cosy, normal life at Willow Cottage. The final papers had come through as Elle was preparing for her GCSEs. There was a lot of lip service paid to not letting it affect her exams, and people treated her very carefully, as if someone had died: the headmistress even called her into her office for 'a little chat', to see if she was all right. Elle hadn't known how to answer when Mrs Barber had asked her how she was coping. How did you explain that you were a horrible person, because you were glad they were splitting up, glad they wouldn't be together any more, glad her dad was going away because these days he just seemed to upset her mum so much? Even when they had to sell the house and move to a barn outside Shawcross, and even when John remarried with what Elle overheard a friend say to Mandana was 'insensitive haste' she knew she didn't care in the way she should. She'd wondered whether she was a homicidal maniac – she'd read a book about them and one of the first signs was a lack of empathy. But Elle was just glad it was over, because it was horrible living like that.

To her secret relief, however, Rhodes obviously felt the same way. He'd gone to college in the States and was now an analyst, working for Bloomberg in New York. The last time she'd seen him was at Christmas at Mum's, and it had been awful – Mum had been drunk, Rhodes had told her she drank too much and was pathetic and anyone could see why Dad had left her, and then stormed out. Elle hadn't spoken to him since. Mum always drank too much, but it had got worse, that summer in Skye, as their marriage got worse. Elle never knew what came first, like the chicken and the egg. She only knew their old life, where her parents had seemed OK, was over.

So Elle didn't wonder what might have happened if her

parents had stayed together. She knew the real ending after the ending. She wondered about people like Lizzy and Darcy, or Beatrice and Benedick instead. Often she felt she was the only person who didn't believe they'd stay together, after the book or the play ended. She couldn't help it; she just didn't believe it.

She was pondering this, her knees under her chin, legs wedged against the table, when the door slammed and Alex came in.

'Oh, hi, Elle,' he said, not looking at her, and slamming his man-bag down on the table. 'How's it going? Any luck today then?'

'OK, thanks,' Elle said. 'Yeah, I—'

'I'm not staying,' Alex said. 'Meeting some guys from work at the pub. Just stopped off to change my shirt.'

'Oh, right,' said Elle, who found Alex's obsession with sharp Ben Sherman shirts half tragic, half touching.

'Hey.' He stopped and grabbed the paper from her. 'Can I just check something? Were you looking at it?'

'At the jobs, but it's fine, there's nothing in it,' Elle said, desperate to talk, even if Alex obviously wasn't interested. 'It's a week old, anyway —'

Alex ignored her and started turning the pages. 'Our new print campaign for Cape Town should be in here somewhere, we rolled it out last week and the fucking muppets haven't sent us any copies yet.'

'But this is last week's —'

He ignored her, and struggled to turn the pages. 'That's fine. Where is it? Hey! There! How cool is that? Yeah, looks good.'

Elle followed his jabbing finger. "'Visit Cape Town, for a World of Possibilities",' she read. 'That's great.'

She nodded politely as Alex talked, and looked down again, her eye caught by something, she didn't know why. And there, right in the middle of the Travel section, amongst ads

for holiday lets in Cornwall and cheap flights to Thailand, she suddenly saw the following:

Editorial Secretary Required for Established
Independent Publishing House

Enthusiastic Self-Starter / Graduate. Must
have office experience

Competitive Salary: £11,000

Please send *curricula vitae* by post to:

Miss Elspeth MacReady
c/o Bluebird Books Ltd, Bedford Square

‘What’s that doing there?’ Elle asked. She snatched the paper out of Alex’s hand. ‘It’s – what’s it doing there?’

‘Don’t know.’ Alex stared at her, annoyed. ‘Actually, Elle, I was looking at that.’

‘Sorry, Alex,’ Elle said, clutching the paper to her bosom and looking at him imploringly, almost in a panic: what if he took the paper away, flung it out of the window, how would she get it back? ‘It’s a job, it sounds perfect. . . . I don’t know why it’s there, it’s in the wrong place . . . Please, let me . . .’ She stared again at the text. ‘“Send *curricula vitae* . . . care of Bluebird Books”.’ She bit her lip. ‘Bluebird Books – I’ve heard of them! They’re proper, they – they’re old!’ She ran into Karen’s bedroom and scanned the precariously built IKEA Billy bookcase, crammed full of well-worn blockbusters, their cracked spines stamped with gold. ‘Yes, I knew it! They publish Victoria Bishop! And . . . Old Tom! They publish Old Tom. Well, Granny Bee would have been pleased.’ She glanced at her watch. It was nearly five thirty p.m. Too late to catch the post. There was no telephone number, either. *No*, a voice

inside her head said. *You're going to go for this. You're going to do something about this, instead of sitting there feeling sorry for yourself.*

Elle bit her lip and marched back to the hall, pulled out a telephone directory, and thumbed through it, kneeling on the ground. Alex came into the hall and watched her.

'Can I have the paper back now, please?' he said, reaching forward.

'No! Just give me ONE SECOND, Alex, PLEASE!' Elle heard herself bellowing. Alex stepped back, annoyed.

'You're really starting to outstay your fucking welcome, you know,' he murmured.

Elle jabbed her finger on the page, and started dialling. It was a week old, that ad – even if it was in the wrong place, what were the chances? 'I'm sorry, Alex,' she said. 'It's probably hopeless, but I've got to give it a go— Hello?'

'Good evening,' said a low voice, a girl's. 'Bluebird Books, how may I help you?'

'Hello – yes. I – er – I just saw an advert in last week's *Evening Standard* for the job of editorial secretary – I wanted to ask if I could still apply? There wasn't a closing date.'

There was a silence, and then the voice spoke again, this time even lower, much closer to the speaker. 'The job ad? You saw it? You want to *apply*? Oh, thank fuck.' She coughed. 'I'm so sorry. I mean, thank goodness.'

'Thank goodness?' Elle was astonished. This wasn't the reception she was used to. The last job she'd rung up about, an editorial assistant's job at an independent publisher in Bristol, the man on the line had said, 'Sorry, position's been filled,' and put the phone down, like a scene from a film about the Great Depression.

'You don't understand.' The girl on the other end sighed, and Elle realised she was around her age, despite the huskiness of her Lancashire-tinged voice. 'No one's applied,' she said quietly. 'Not a soul. I don't understand it. And Miss

Sassoon keeps checking, and we have to have someone in soon, otherwise she'll go totally mad – it's been a week, a *week*, and nothing! Nothing!

'Look,' Elle said. 'I think I know why.'

'Why? Why what?' The voice rose sharply again.

'Well. The ad's in the holiday homes section,' she said quickly. 'It's a total fluke I saw it.'

'The *what*?'

'Holiday homes. Between an ad for a nice cottage in Norfolk and a bungalow in the Lizard.'

There was a terrible silence, pregnant with meaning.

'Oh . . . FUCK,' the voice whispered. 'FUCK. She is going to kill me. K.I.L.L.L.L. me. How did I—'

'I don't think it's your fault, is it?' Elle said. 'It's the people who do the ads, they put it in wrongly.'

'She won't see it like that. Oh, God, oh, Jesus,' the voice said. 'What am I going to do? That's why. Oh, Jesus. She's going to ask me tomorrow. Oh, Christ.'

'Listen here –' Elle said, authoritatively. She nodded to herself. *Go for it!* 'Why don't you get me in for an interview. Eh?'

There was another silence. 'Yes,' the girl said eventually, breathing out with a long whistle. 'OK, can you come in tomorrow, first thing? She's not got anything on then, neither's he. And if you're rubbish, I'll just confess and we can do it again so we've got someone by the time Posy comes back from holiday. 'Cause she said she'd leave if she came back and they hadn't replaced Hannah . . . Man alive.' There was a loud thudding sound.

'What was that?' Elle asked, alarmed.

'I was banging my head on the desk. Look, if you come in, *please* don't tell Miss Sassoon. Please.'

'Of course I won't,' said Elle. 'Who is she, anyway?'

'You've never heard of Felicity Sassoon?'

'No, never.'

‘And you want to work in publishing?’

‘Yes,’ Elle said. ‘Oh, I really do.’

‘Well, you’ve got to get this job. So I’m going to help you. Hold on.’ There was some rustling on the line. ‘Just checking everyone’s gone, it’s Rory’s birthday, they’ve gone to the pub. Well, Miss Sassoon’s father set up Bluebird, ages ago. It’s er, something like the last of the old publishers in Bedford Square and she’s really into that, so go on about that, I did and it worked a treat. You’ll be working for her son, Rory. And Posy, who’s another editor. Rory does crime and young trendy fiction, Posy does women’s fiction, sagas, some of Felicity’s authors.’ She stopped. ‘I mean, I presume you actually want to work with books like that, don’t you? You want to get into publishing? They’ll ask you what you’ve read lately, all that stuff, if you know any Bluebird authors. Have you got something to say?’

Elle took a deep breath. ‘Well, I loved *Captain Corelli* and I’m halfway through *Bridget Jones*, plus I’m a huge fan of Victoria Bishop and my granny had all of Old Tom’s Devon stories, but I also studied English at university and my favourite author is probably Charlotte Brontë.’

‘Oh, they’ll beat that out of you soon enough, but it’s a start. OK, so next—’

‘Hold on,’ said Elle. ‘What’s your name?’

‘It’s Libby,’ said the voice. ‘Libby Yates. What’s yours?’

‘Eleanor Bee,’ said Elle. ‘But call me Elle, everyone does.’

‘Do they now.’ The laconic tone was back, and you’d never have known she’d been so flustered. ‘Hello, Eleanor Bee. On with the tutorial. So . . .’

JUST UNDER TWO weeks later, on Tuesday 6 May, Eleanor Bee stood at the bottom of the steps of a big house and stared at the blue enamel sign hanging above her.

Bluebird Books

Est. 1932

(bird logo to follow)

‘I have confidence,’ she muttered to herself. She looked down at her smart charcoal grey trousers – new from Warehouse, on Saturday – and the raspberry pink short-sleeved jumper, at her beautiful soft black Mary Janes with the small heel from Pied a Terre which were only twenty pounds in the Christmas sale and which she was still unable to quite believe were hers. It was a beautiful spring day, and the newly green trees in Bedford Square swayed behind her. In the distance she could hear the clanging of a Routemaster bus bell, but otherwise it was completely quiet. Eleanor climbed the stairs and rang on the front door.

She was so nervous, she felt her knees might give way

underneath her. She'd been here before, for her interview the week before last, but it seemed ages ago. Perhaps the whole thing was a huge mistake. Elle couldn't shake the feeling that she was an imposter – she was only standing here because no one else had applied, and because the terrifying Miss Sassoon, who'd briefly interviewed her, had been impressed that she'd heard of *Forever Amber*, because the only other person she'd seen had been some daughter of a friend of a friend, and she'd never heard of it. Well, Elle had thought, why were you interviewing the daughter of a friend of a friend? That's no way to find the best people, surely?

'So you've read it?' Miss Sassoon had asked.

'Oh, yes.' Elle was very fond of *Forever Amber*. She'd been reading it during the awful holiday in Skye all those years ago. 'I couldn't put it down. I – I enjoyed it even more than *Gone with the Wind*.'

'That,' Miss Sassoon had said firmly, 'is a subject for another day.' Elle thought she'd annoyed her, but Miss Sassoon had smiled and called for Libby to show her out, and then she'd been interviewed by Rory, who was very nice, in his early thirties, friendly and far less scary than his mother, so she'd relaxed and just chatted, and he'd teased her about liking the Spice Girls and then she'd left, and Libby had rung her at home that evening to say thanks. 'I think they liked you. I know Rory's bored of temps and the old lady just wants it sorted out, ASAP. You're definitely in with a chance.'

And for once that chance was hers. They'd given her the job, and she was here and now – she had no idea what came next. Elle rang the doorbell again, more firmly.

'Helloooo?' an elderly voice said into the intercom.

'Hello? It's Eleanor . . . Eleanor Bee. It's my first day, I'm Rory and Posy's new secretary, they told me to get here for ten . . . ?'

'First floor. Please commmee innnn. . . .' the intercom said in querulous tones.

Elle climbed the wide stairs to the first floor and at the top she pushed open a swinging door to be greeted by Elspeth MacReady, office manager, wiping her hands on her skirt, and bending double, her rheumy eyes darting unhappily about her.

‘Good morning, Eleanor,’ she said formally. ‘Good to see you again. Welcome to Bluebird Books. Mr Rory is in a meeting. He asked me to get you settled in. Here we are.’

Elle looked around her, taking it all in once more. A real-life publishing house. Where people made books, all day. And she was here, she was one of them! What a magical place! Strung out across the oatmeal carpet on the huge first floor were a collection of yellowing wooden desks surrounded by wall dividers, greying filing cabinets, and books. There were books everywhere, on shelves, in piles on floors, spilling out of cardboard boxes. It was strangely at odds with the beautiful old wood panelling on the walls, the four or five old portraits in gilt frames. She could see Bedford Square in the sunshine from the huge windows.

‘Do you know where you will be sitting?’ Elspeth asked. ‘Has anyone explained to you the rules for the kitty, or about the keys?’

‘No,’ said Elle. ‘I only really – I met Rory briefly and then—’

‘Oh, dear. Oh, dear.’ Elspeth shook her head. ‘Someone should have told you –’ She sighed, and her long thin frame shuddered.

‘I’m sorry,’ Elle said.

‘It’s fine. Now. Where to start. Firstly, each employee is issued with a key. This key is extremely important. The last person to leave the building at night turns the lights off and locks the front door with the key.’

‘Yes . . . ?’ Elle said weakly. ‘Then what?’

‘Well, that’s it,’ Elspeth said. ‘But it’s *very important*.’

‘Of course.’

‘And we ask that people, if they wish to join, contribute

two pounds a month to the kitty for tea and coffee, and Miss Sassoon *very kindly* provides biscuits.'

'Right,' said Elle. 'And . . . ?'

'Well, that's also it,' said Elspeth. 'For the moment,' she added, firmly. 'Ah. Here is your desk. And this is Libby. Have you met already?'

'Yes,' said Elle, smiling gratefully at Libby, who was typing furiously, a Dictaphone machine next to her keyboard. Libby stopped and took her headphones off, raising a hand in greeting and pushing her dark blonde bob out of her eyes. She was wearing Anaïs Anaïs; Elle remembered it from their first meeting.

'Hi, Elle. Nice to have you here.'

Elle looked away from her, blushing as if they had been caught red-handed, like secret lovers. She stared at the desk in front of her. 'Oh, my goodness,' she said.

'Is there a problem?' Elspeth asked, panic in her voice.

'I have a phone,' Elle said, unable to believe it. 'And a computer.'

'Of course you do,' Elspeth said. She looked at her suspiciously.

A voice from the office behind them boomed, 'Elspeth. Come here, please.'

Like a cartoon character, Elspeth shot across the floor. Elle watched her open the old wooden door, saw a flash of a flared dark pink corduroy skirt, a woman whose hair was swept into a big bun, fat fingers with two massive rings cutting into them, and the big carved wooden desk she'd sat at the previous week for her interview. *Felicity*. 'Rory says the manuscript—' she heard, and then the door shut.

'Take a seat then,' Libby said, watching her. 'Don't stand around looking like a lemon.'

'No,' Elle said hastily. She sank down into the scruffy black chair in front of her and put her hands tentatively to the keyboard. There was an empty blue plastic in tray, a shiny

black phone with a tangled cord, and a wire pen holder, with four biros and a pencil in it. She stroked the keyboard of her computer, opened the top drawer of the desk. 'There are Post-its,' she said, almost to herself. 'I have my own Post-its.'

Libby smiled. 'You are daft.'

She put her headphones back on and carried on typing. Elle opened the drawers a couple of times and pressed the button on the front of her grey computer monitor. She stared at the shelves by their desks. Trying to look like she had something to do, she reached over and picked some books out. There were old hardbacks, each stamped at the bottom of the spine with a gold bluebird, and lots of paperbacks, most of them pretty old, some green and orange Penguins. Lots of Victoria Bishops in hardback, all called things like *To Carry the Night* and *Lanterns Over Mandalay*, lots of Thomas Hodgsons: *Old Tom On Dartmoor*, *Old Tom's Springtime*, *Christmas with Old Tom* . . . She rolled her eyes. How boring!

There were lots of thrillers. She stood up and picked a few off the shelves. *Funeral in the Bunker*, which had a big swastika across it. Old historical novels, called things like *Katharine's Promise* and *To Catch a King*. One shelf had a row of copies of the same book, *Quantox's Dilemma*, the only vaguely new thing she could see anywhere, by someone called Paris Donaldson, with a hilarious photo of the author, in black-and-white, posing looking moodily into the distance. Elle wanted to laugh. He looked a bit like her flatmate Alex.

But it was the bottom shelf that was most alarming. It stretched out on either side of the desks, row upon row of books all with a heart on the spine entwined with the words 'MyHeart'. Elle's eyes nearly popped out as she read the titles. *He was a Sheikh* . . . *She was a Nurse*. *My Lord, My Captor*. *The Dastardly Duke's Revenge*. *Devil in a White Coat*.

'Oh, my goodness . . .' Elle whispered, trying not to laugh. 'Libby . . . what's MyHeart?'

Libby looked up at her, and then took off her headphones again with a sigh. 'What?'

'What's MyHeart?' Elle pointed.

'Our romance list. We publish two a month. Posy's in charge of it.'

'So . . . I'll have to work on those books then?'

'Er – yes.' Libby raised an eyebrow. 'Why, is that a problem?'

Elle blushed. 'No, of course not! It's just . . . they've got such funny names, don't you think?'

'MyHeart is the most successful part of the company, apart from the four big authors,' Libby said. 'I wouldn't make fun of it anywhere near Felicity, if I were you.'

Elle flushed with shame, feeling perspiration flowering on her forehead, under her armpits. 'Yes, of course. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to . . .' How stupid she sounded! Her eyes were dry; she rubbed them. She thought she might still be a bit hungover. The bank holiday weekend, despite her best intentions, had been a big one, from which she was still recovering. The beautiful weather and the Labour landslide meant everyone was in a euphoric mood. They'd stayed in Holland Park all day, drinking, chatting, flirting. She'd even snogged Fred again, and this time she'd really enjoyed it. It was nice, kissing someone in a park as evening came, feeling the moist grass between your toes, his lips on yours, your fingers twining with his . . .

Libby carried on typing. Elle sat up straight and blinked hard, wondering what the hell she should do next, when the door to Felicity's office opened and Rory emerged with a woman in her mid-thirties. The carved wooden door closed again as though someone was standing behind it, showing people in and out, in the manner of an audience with the Queen.

Rory was frowning. 'We should have gone for it, Pose. It's lunacy to be turning it down. Don't listen to her.'

The woman ignored him and walked towards Elle. 'Eleanor?'

Welcome! I'm Posy. Nice to meet you. Sorry not to have before. So glad you're here!' She was pretty, rather flustered looking, with pink cheeks and thin hair which curled tentatively at her neck and behind her ears; she looked the way a Posy should. 'Now –' She pulled up a chair and sat down next to Elle at her desk. 'Let's go through some things, shall we?' She smiled, and ran her hands over her forehead. 'You've met—'

'Hey, Posy, give the kid a chance.' Rory stood behind her and put his hand on Posy's shoulder. 'Hi, Eleanor. Great to see you again. Welcome. Has Libby been showing you the ropes? You should cultivate her, even if she is a bit stropy and supports a rubbish football team.'

Libby, who had carried on typing throughout this exchange, could obviously hear enough of it through her headphones, as she raised one palm. 'Talk to the hand,' she said.

'Rory,' Posy said. 'Why don't I run Eleanor through some stuff, take her round and introduce her to people.'

'Good idea, very good idea,' Rory said. 'We can take her to lunch afterwards.'

There was a slight pause. 'Well . . .' said Posy. 'Abigail Barrow's just delivered and I have to – I can't really.' She turned to Elle. 'Sorry, Elle. We'll take you out another time.'

'Oh, no, please, I'll be fine,' Elle said hurriedly. She couldn't imagine anything worse, sitting with her bosses making small talk. And anyway, she wanted to fulfil her cherished lunch plan: find a Pret a Manger, have a sandwich, and sit in a park with the *Evening Standard* like a proper office worker.

Rory leaned forward. 'I'll clear out. Why don't we have a chat after Posy's finished with you. We're really glad you're here,' he said. 'It's a nightmare, getting used to things. I hated it, when I first started.'

'Were you a secretary?' Elle asked.

Posy gave a snort of laughter. 'Rory! That's a good one. He's never sent a fax in his life. Now, come on, Elle, let's—'

‘Only ever worked at Foyles and here, for my sins,’ Rory said, ignoring her. He grimaced. ‘I’m nepotism in human form, you know. My mother wanted me to be involved in the business, and – well, I love books, of course, though we need to change. It’s an interesting time to be in the game.’

“‘The game”,’ Posy scoffed, sitting back down again. ‘Rory’s very flash, Eleanor. I’m staid and boring and like actually editing my books and building authors. Rory has a horror of the mid-list and he only likes authors who look attractive in photos.’

‘Like Paris Donaldson,’ Elle said seriously, but was surprised when Posy roared with laughter and Rory, after a second of looking annoyed, slapped his hands on the desk and joined in.

‘She’s sharp, that one,’ Rory said. ‘Yes, like Paris Donaldson, exactly. All the guys wanna be like him, all the girls love him. Gold dust.’

‘I think he’s a prick,’ said Posy. ‘But we don’t agree about anything, do we, Rory?’

‘No, my love,’ Rory answered easily. ‘We don’t. I’ll leave you two to it. Good luck again, Elle.’

He wandered off, whistling. Elle saw the look Posy gave as her eyes followed him. ‘Er’ she said, after a moment. ‘Right, let’s get on with it.’

By lunchtime, Elle was ready for food, and she could have done with a large drink, too. Her head was buzzing. She had been walked through everything by Posy, who would say, ‘It’s *very* important you don’t forget to do this,’ and, ‘Please make sure you *always* check this *extremely carefully*,’ but if Elle was honest she hadn’t understood about seventy-five per cent of what she’d been told. Posy kept explaining things and Elle kept writing them down in her ring-bound notebook, sentences that didn’t seem to make any sense.

You need to keep an eye on Jews to make sure you don't run out of stock didn't look right, in fact it looked downright disturbing.

When proof covs come in from prod send 1 to agent 2 to the author, with note from Posy pp me file the other two, one in the author file, one in the covs circ file. What did this mean?

If Ed Victor or Abner Stein phones get Posy immediately. No matter where she is. If someone called Lorcan phones put him on hold and find P or Tony, don't let him ring off, impossible to track down.

But if woman called Georgina King phones saying she's a MyHeart author and she has the support of the RNA, get rid of her. Do not put her through to P. She is a lunatic. Elle had nodded and stuck a Post-it on the bottom of her monitor with 'Georgina King Lunatic' in large letters, trying to look as though she was On It. Finally Posy said, 'Is that all starting to make some sense? Is there anything you're not clear on? I know it must seem a bit overwhelming, but just ask if there's anything. Really important you ask.'

Just ask. Elle was so used to hearing that, in every job she'd had, temping, summer jobs, Saturday jobs. *Just ask.* It was a load of rubbish. They never meant it. If you did pluck up the courage to ask they looked at you as if you'd just been sick all over them. And where should she start, anyway? RNA? Grid? Jews? But this time she had to try. She took a deep breath. Which should she pick?

'Who's Lorcan?' she asked.

'Lorcan?' Posy nodded. 'He's the model we use on nearly every MyHeart cover. Big muscly guy, long hair, white teeth, you know the kind. He's almost as popular as the actual books. We're always trying to pin him down for shoots and he's never around. So when we can get hold of him, we have to cling on for dear life. He's the bane of Tony's life.' Elle looked blank. 'Tony the art director. Look, why don't I take you round to meet everyone now?'

She walked Elle around the floor, briskly introducing her to a sea of faces Elle knew she'd never remember. People

were friendly but uninterested. When Posy said things like, 'Sam's the marketing assistant, she works with Jeremy, our marketing director,' Elle would smile and nod, though she actually wanted to shout, 'I've no idea what's going on! I can't shake your hand because I've sweated through my stupid new jumper and you'll see my armpits are wet!'

'Fetch your jacket and I'll walk out to lunch with you. I need to get a sandwich too.'

Elle swivelled around and realised she had no idea where she actually sat, she had lost her bearings completely. Posy looked at her as if she were a complete moron.

'I'm sorry,' Elle whispered. 'Just a bit confused, can't remember where I'm going.'

Something in Posy's expression changed. 'You poor thing. I remember what it was like, my first day in my job. I cried in the loos.'

Now I want to remember where the loos are and go and cry in them, Elle thought.