

## Chapter One

### Cambridge, the present day, October

Head down, looking neither left nor right, collar turned up, Mary hurried back across Christ's Piece. The city was just coming alive in the morning rush hour, but those already out paid her no attention, and she was happy to reciprocate. She passed the magnificent medieval gatehouse of Christ's itself without even a glance. Down Petty Cury, her heels clicking like horseshoes on the pavement, past the Guildhall and the market, its stalls being uncovered in the early morning sun, and on to King's Parade. The day was sunny but cold, crisp and sharp, and her breath, coming in pants now, spread white in the air before her.

Down the passage between King's and Cath's, a path under the brutalist concrete jungle of the Keynes Building. Left into Queens Lane, and almost into a run as the college gatehouse drew near. Nearly back and no-one had seen her, no inconvenient questions, no knowing looks. She glanced at her watch, not yet nine, no need to worry now. The great wooden gate was still closed emphatically against the world, but she entered through the little postern, just wide enough to allow a single person to pass.

'Good morning, Doctor Dawson, you *have* been out early.'

A porter appeared just outside his lodge as she entered, almost as if he had been waiting for her. Mary curtly acknowledged the greeting, not missing the emphasis on the 'have', nor the mocking tone of the comment. She was sure she

had seen the ghost of a smile as he greeted her; he must have known she had not left the college that morning.

Mary in fact had left the college twelve hours before. Her destination had been far from the medieval spires and comfortable combination rooms of collegiate Cambridge, in culture if not in distance. There had been a party out beyond Parker's Piece, crowded rooms and corridors lined with anonymous partygoers in regulation tee-shirt and jeans, an incessant throbbing beat from the music generators, and loads of cheap red wine. No wonder, after one glass or three, she had taken up with him; in the half light his unkempt appearance had looked poetic, almost Byronic. She remembered it all now: walking along dark streets of ex-workmen's cottages, next to each other on a battered sofa, the taste of his mouth, climbing up steep stairs and then into bed, their clothes abandoned on the floor, their limbs entwined, embracing, stroking, arousing. She remembered her body pressed against his, arching in rhythmic pulses, and then finally the burning fire of climax, release from all her tensions and inhibitions. It was like a dream, or fantasy, as if it had been someone else, an actress on a cinema screen, not her, who had experienced it. But now she knew that was not true; now in the dawn the veil was stripped away, the romance and ecstasy had gone, and reality shone brutally through.

Mary could feel, without needing to turn, his glance towards his fellow porter in the lodge, and was sure she could hear their collective laugh. She just smiled to herself. They might suspect why she had been out all night, but they didn't know. And it was probably just as well. It would not do for people to find out that the Admissions Tutor of St Matthew's College had just had a drunken one-night stand. But it was not likely that they would; she covered her tracks well, adopting her alternative persona. A clerk at the Council Offices indeed!

But now she needed to revert from Hyde to Jekyll. She took the gravel path around the lawn of Old Court, striding with the authority now of a senior fellow, past the crumbling statue of one of the Henries, down towards the river. Passing under the fifteenth century stone archway into New Court, she looked left to see Staircase C, her staircase. She climbed the wooden stairs, and paused at the firmly locked outer door, above which was painted, in white on black, in the traditional manner:

*Dr M Dawson, Admissions Tutor.*

She unlocked her 'oak', pushed open the green baize covered inner door, where still were pinned messages for her tutees from the term before, and entered into her living room. She had entered another world, a parallel universe existing in the same time as the bed-sit where she'd spent the night. It was a lovely room. An elaborate Victorian fireplace faced the door, loaded with white carded and gold edged invitations. Comfortable chairs and sofas occupied the centre, with a low coffee table covered in magazines. In the wall to the right of the door there were two doors, opening into her bedroom and study, and opposite, two large sash windows with window seats looked out over the Cam, where, in summer, the punts loaded with giggling and screaming cargoes could be seen below. But today the river was empty and still, and just the cows on the other side of the Cam, lowing mournfully in the cold air, provided a distraction.

Mary did not have time to take all this in. She rushed into the bedroom, throwing off her clothes, noticing with distaste that her outfit of the night before, a tight black top and flared black miniskirt, stank of sour wine and cigarette smoke. Her underwear was worse, smelling of sweat and sex. She looked at her watch, just enough time for a soak in the bath, to get her in a relaxed mood for the important day ahead. Putting on a dressing gown, she grabbed a towel and toilet bag, and set out for the

bathroom. That was the problem with these old sets, they had no modern plumbing, she thought, no en-suite, but then if she wanted to live in a glorified hotel room she could have gone to one of the newer colleges; she could have taken her pick. Gone to one of the new women's colleges, they'd have welcomed her with open arms. But that would have meant living in an anonymous identikit campus building, and the thought of all that feminist angst filled her with horror. No, she liked the sense of history and the mix of the sexes there was at St Matthew's. Even though women had only been admitted to the college for the last thirty years, she felt she was part of a tradition going back to medieval monasticism.

Luxuriating in one of the college's baths – ancient and Spartan, but as deep as Loch Ness – the events of the night before came again into her mind, giving her a guilty jolt as her adventures of the night before intruded into her world of respectability.

*'Why did I do it?'*

Maybe it was the rebel in her coming out, the rejection of conventional behaviour that had been a feature of her character since she was a teenager, often hidden as she progressed up the academic tree. Perhaps it was a liking, even a need, for sex, and a hatred of commitment. Or maybe she just liked the contradiction: the apparently bluestocking don turning into a tart at night. Of course, she thought, even her guilt was a reflection of sexist attitudes: male dons had been doing the same illicit assignations with both men and women for generations with little if any censure. In any case, she didn't have time to reflect on it. Out of the bath, she dressed speedily ready for work. She looked at her watch. God almighty, it was already nine o'clock. And it was not any ordinary day. Today was the first day of Michaelmas Term: the long vacation was over.

She took care in her choice of clothes. There was a full College Council meeting at ten, and there was the welcome reception for the new undergraduates that afternoon. A pristine white blouse with a lace front, low cut, but not showing too much cleavage. A black, sheer mid-calf, skirt and a short matching black jacket. Small gold ear-rings and a locket round her neck completed the costume. Sober black and white, more like a barrister than an academic, thought Mary. She applied light but well-chosen make-up: a natural colour lipstick, some blusher, and just a touch of eye shadow; she did not want people to say she let the college down. And of course it mattered so much more because she was a woman; the men could come in scruffy sports jackets and jeans, but she would never get away with that.

Now she was ready, composed and really quite looking forward to the day. It was always an important day in any Cambridge college: the enrolling or Matriculation of all the new students, the freshers, to the college. She had the ancient position to complete this ritual: the Praelector. For hundreds of years the new students would have stood in the same hall as the latest intake would today. It was a humbling thought. She could not help but think back to the time she was one herself: a timid, eighteen year old from a northern comprehensive school. Now she was the confident one, the one in authority, the one who knew the ropes. Mary enjoyed the contrast. She always enjoyed meeting the new intake; she had of course interviewed them all, and thought they were a good lot. The previous year's freshers, the new second year, had been an exceptional year, one of the college's best, and it seemed inconceivable that the New Year would be better. But Mary was always optimistic for her students; even if they weren't quite the same standard, she was sure they would not let her down. Had she been able to look into the future then, she would have been amazed at what the new

intake, and in particular two of the girls, were going to get up to, and would not have been as cheery as she was, humming a tune to herself, something from Puccini she thought, as she made her last preparations.

She took a last look in the mirror, touched her hair, and just ran her lipstick one more time across her top lip: she was ready. A little smile crossed her lips; she knew she would turn a few heads at Council. And that mattered. Yes, she was ambitious. The post could be a stepping-stone in the future to becoming Senior Tutor. If she reached that rank, she would be the first woman to attain it at St Matthew's. But she could not dwell on such considerations. The time for the Council meeting was nigh...

As Mary lay soaking in her bath, things were stirring at the front of St Matthew's College<sup>1</sup>. Down by the front gate, what had been a few minutes earlier a quiet lane was now transformed as if by a magic wand. Almost as if on cue, it was filled with cars, estate wagons, 4-by-4s and taxis. Today was the start of the University year. Young voices of both sexes, some plummy, some with regional accents, resounded across the pavement. Cases, rucksacks, old-fashioned trunks, plastic bags, cardboard boxes, all lay scattered across the road, as people went to and fro, carrying, unloading, sweating and grunting as the cherished possessions and vital components on which the students would survive for the next term at least were transferred from vehicle to room. Parents and children milled around, keys were obtained, goodbyes made. There were some tears, but laughter and exuberance too. Some looked up at the college with apprehension, fearing a life in an environment that for most was

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<sup>1</sup> If you are not familiar with St Matthew's College, a description of the college from H. G. Postlethwaite's *Cambridge Colleges* is attached at the end of the novel.

totally alien, but others swept enthusiastically on, looking forward to the new life that lay ahead. And there were tears too from parents. There would be an empty bed in their house tonight, and when the former occupant returned they would meet a different person.

But finally the bedlam was ceasing. The last boxes were being carried up staircases and into rooms, the last hugs and kisses were being made, the last few cars were pulling away from their precarious lean across the ancient pavement. The porters breathed a sigh of relief, and went back to discussing last night's football. Timid dons came out again, and went about their business. Only on the staircases was there noise and excitement, as new friendships were made, clothes and possessions were unpacked, and coffee was shared. Even the least thoughtful and most insensitive undergraduates realised they now had to deal with a world which was very different to that they lived in twenty-four hours before.

‘You can't leave the car parked there, mother, right in front of the main gate. There are clearly double yellow lines. Just drop me off here. I'll be fine.’

One last car remained. A silver Mercedes, its dignity impugned as two wheels were cocked up on the ancient pavement. The two women trying to heave a substantial trunk out of the boot were indubitably mother and daughter. The girl was pretty, a long oval face contained strong features dominated by large blue eyes. A well-shaped head accentuated by her short blonde hair in a kind of elfin cut sat on top of a slim and athletic, but shapely body that immediately betrayed her femininity. She was dressed in smart jeans and a tan leather jacket over a cream designer sweater with a chiffon scarf tucked casually around her neck, simultaneously displaying both dress sense and money. Her mother was an older version. Wrapped in a fur coat, a tight

miniskirt, and with substantial makeup, it was not surprising that her daughter's attitude to her mother was usually that of embarrassment.

'Well, darling, as long as you'll be all right. Will you be able to get the luggage up the stairs? They'll be very steep, I'm sure.'

'I'll get a porter to help if necessary. Don't fuss!'

'O.K. then. Best of luck, darling, ring us and let us know how you get on.'

'I will. And you'd better go, there's a traffic warden coming.' She kissed her mother on the cheek, and waved as the car pulled away and disappeared at the end of the lane.

So Pauline was left alone with her trunk at the gate. The people that were about hurried past, their business of such urgency that they didn't notice the young woman in the middle of the pavement. No porter appeared to help her. Strangely, now her mother had gone she found that she missed her. Even though it was only a few seconds, she felt quite abandoned, and for once in her life self-confidence was deserting her.

She stared at the enormous medieval wooden door, set in its Tudor gatehouse, trying hard not to be impressed. Standing before it, realising the centuries of history that it had witnessed guarding the college, and knowing that she would now be a part of it, briefly overwhelmed her. Then she pulled herself together, strode to the postern dragging her trunk, and passed through into the college. She marched up regally to the porters lodge desk, where she was greeted by a bowler-hatted porter, who smiled at her youthful bravado.

'I'm a new member of the college.'

'I thought you might be, Miss. What's your name?'

'Marchmont, Pauline Marchmont. Can someone help with my trunk?' she said reaching ostentatiously inside her purse.



‘We’ll arrange that, miss. You’re on Staircase C. Here’s your welcome pack.’

In it she found her room key, a folder with information on the college and first week events, and directions to her room. It was in an old part of the college, a Victorian building inappropriately called New Court, with ivy in profusion all over the walls, and all sorts of little turrets and twisty staircases and dormer windows. It seemed like a re-creation of J K Rowling’s Hogwarts, or was Hogwarts a re-creation of here, she couldn’t really decide.

At the entrance to the staircase, she saw there was already a black board with the names of all occupants painted on in white. Even to Pauline, it was a pleasure to see one’s name there: the evidence one really did belong. Glancing through the names, she noticed Mary’s, the only tutor on the staircase.

She went up two flights of narrow ancient wooden stairs, and on to a landing off which there were a number of rooms behind forbidding doors. One she saw was a gyp room, as the label on the door said. Intrigued, she looked inside, and realised there was a fridge and microwave, and some gas rings, but little more. On the wall was a notice threatening dire consequences to anyone who left appliances running unnecessarily. Obviously a gyp room was just a kitchen, clearly part of the special vocabulary of the university, she thought. She looked in the fridge. The sight inside was not promising; the few items of indeterminate food were obscured by some kind of mould. She shut the door hurriedly.

Opening her own door she went into a high airy bed-sitting room. The furnishing was sparse but adequate, best described as twenty-first century IKEA. There was a desk, chair, coffee table and armchair, together with shelves. All very modern, with spindly black metal legs, and imitation pine finish on the surfaces. There was a single bed, already made with bed linen

supplied, and a wardrobe and bedside table with lamp, in much the same style. She looked out of the window, and saw a glorious view, much the same as Mary's, across the Cam. For a moment youthful enthusiasm replaced cynical ennui, she revelled in the sheer joy of being a student in Cambridge.

As the moment passed, Pauline realised she was thirsty. The excitement of the day had taken its toll. She wandered into the gyp room. On the table top was an electric kettle.

## Chapter Two

‘So this is it? Why do I not feel anything? Why am I not elated?’

An attractive girl sat on the edge of her bed, deflated and down. Lucy’s mother had dropped her off earlier. She’d waved her goodbye from the front gate, and then returned to her room to unpack. But instead she was just sitting. Why was it such an anticlimax? This should be the best moment of her life. She had single-mindedly worked for her place at St Matthew’s for two years, ever since the school enrolled her in the special Oxbridge programme. No one really believed she could do it, she read that in their voices.

‘Of course, Lucy, if you want to try, we’ll give you all the support you need.’

But they hadn’t believed in her. That just made her more determined. She had worked every minute, well almost, to get the grades, attended the interview, danced around the house when the results came, been the toast of the family.

‘Our Lucy’s going up to Cambridge this October. Yes, we’re very proud of her.’

And now she was here. It should be special. And it didn’t feel any different: just ordinary. No romance, no style. It was a standard student’s room. It didn’t even have a good view; she was looking out over the dustbins, with a high brick wall behind them. What delights lay behind it, she wondered? Another college, with fairytale settings, and excitement, and amazing people, perhaps, whilst she was stuck in her room. She felt quite alone; no-one had spoken to her except for her mother, and the

porter. But he had been as welcoming as an immigration officer. It was all so flat. She knew she was being silly; she had only been there a couple of hours. But surely something should have happened by now.

She flicked back the strand of blond hair that perennially slipped down across her forehead, so regularly that the flick had become an involuntary response, almost a nervous tic. She was proud of her long hair, which hung below her shoulders, and which she conscientiously combed and straightened every day. Not that Lucy was vain; it was just that the hair was part of her personality, and the grooming was restful, a break from the intensity of study that had so dominated her life in recent years. She was dressed in tight top and jeans that she knew showed off her figure. At first glance, the clothes looked in the latest fashion, but a deeper look indicated they were Primark rather than Harrods. Lucy would have preferred to have better, if she could have afforded it; though no man-eater, she liked attracting admiring reactions from males, at least as long as they were from attractive young men, and did not become crude and leering. Despite the financial restrictions on her wardrobe, she did not find it difficult to obtain boyfriends, though there had not been anyone special so far. This had not mattered too much to Lucy as in recent months academic work had dominated her life, and outside of that most of her time was spent on her other passion, music. She was a Grade 8 cellist, and the hope of advancing her music had been a major factor in choosing St Matthew's, noted for the quality of its music, and with Stephen Cartwright as its director of music. In fact, one of the images that had driven her on through the hours of study had been the dream of life at Cambridge: sophisticated parties, musical soirees, beautiful people, and of course her ideal man to sweep her off her feet. But that all seemed miles away as she wallowed in the anticlimax of her first day.

She looked disconsolately at the briefing she had been given in her welcome folder. So dull and bureaucratic.

*3.00 Matriculation and Welcome Reception for newcomers to college.*

*Address by the Praelector and Admissions Tutor, Dr Mary Dawson.*

It didn't sound very exciting. She remembered Dr Dawson. Pleasant enough, but they all seemed so remote, these dons. There was another mention of her somewhere, she thought? Yes, there it was, she shuffled through her papers.

*Dr Dawson, Director of Studies for History*

*Tutor Group A*

*Lucy Lamont*

*Pauline Marchmont*

*Annie Smith*

*David Darnell*

*Jules Lonsdale*

God knows who all these people were, but she'd find out soon. Before she could think any further, there was a knock on the door. As Lucy opened it, there was an apparition on the doorstep.

Lucy was not gay, but she was immediately captivated by the sight of the most beautiful girl she had ever seen. Pretty, with fine features, lovely hair, a body perfectly proportioned. And so well-dressed: smart jeans, a cream sweater with chiffon scarf casually but perfectly tied about her neck and a light tan leather jacket draped across her shoulders. All the best quality, all

matching perfectly. She could have been a fashion model on a catwalk. Everything Lucy wanted to be, in fact. Lucy wasn't a total pessimist about her appearance; she knew many boys fancied her, though sometimes she wasn't sure why. But this girl was in a different league.

'Do you know how to get this to work?'

Oh, the accent. This beauty so matched what Lucy imagined Cambridge would be like. It was as if she was in a dream. Lucy was struck dumb.

'I said, do you know how to operate this?'

Lucy realised she was holding up an electric kettle. Of course, how could such a vision need to trouble herself with such things?

'Yes, I think I do.'

'Good, will you come and set it up in my room then.'

Not merely had the apparition spoken to her, but even offered the intimacy of entering her room. Lucy faithfully and joyfully followed her into her room. After she set up the kettle, until it satisfyingly gurgled and started to bring forth gushes of steam, Lucy looked around her, the task done. On the bed and in the open wardrobe were stretched out loads more clothes of every type.

'You are lucky to have such clothes. Can I look?'

'Be my guest.'

Lucy looked through the wardrobe, prising aside the layers of dresses, skirts, slacks like a botanist pushing aside grasses to expose a rare orchid... As she came across the best and most unusual specimens, her murmurs of appreciation pleased the hostess. Here was a girl who appreciated good taste, and acknowledged her supremacy in it.

'Here's your coffee.'

She handed Lucy the coffee in an elegant china mug, clearly purchased in an upmarket department store, not a chipped old

blue one like Lucy had. There was a laptop open on the table. Lucy looked at the DVDs around it. She was most surprised to see some of the titles. She couldn't stop herself commenting on them.

‘Aren't those a bit naughty?’

‘Very, you must come round and watch one some time.’

‘I'm not sure it's me, really.’

‘You sound a bit of a goody-goody.’

Lucy was a little shocked. Though she was not a virgin, her view of sex was very much romanticised, and this girl seemed to be suggesting a quite different outlook. Lucy had never watched pornography, and had disapproved if any of her boyfriends had suggested anything at all unusual. But equally, she did not want to be seen as prudish, and she did not want to alienate her new friend. Besides, things at Cambridge would probably be more adventurous than in her native Yorkshire. And not long before she had been bemoaning the lack of excitement.

‘No, I'm not at all. Yes, I'd like to, sometime,’ she said rather cautiously. She didn't want to let the apparition, who from the name on letters and books lying around was called Pauline, think she was chicken. She knew she wanted to impress her, let her think she was also a woman of the world.

Rapidly changing the subject, Lucy went back to the topic of fashion. She had stopped by an especially gorgeous simmering blue off the shoulder silk dress, and ran her fingers lovingly up and down the material.

‘This is so beautiful. But will you ever get a chance to wear it?’

‘Oh yes, I'm going to wear it to the Amberson Dinner next week.’

‘What's the Amberson?’

‘It's a private dining club. Originally all male, but a few women are allowed in now.’

Lucy was impressed, but not surprised. Clearly Pauline was a division up on the rest of the freshers.

‘I’ll invite you on one of our guest nights, if you like.’

Lucy readily showed her appreciation. These were the kind of people she wanted to meet and mix with. Suddenly Cambridge was becoming alive for her; the magic she had sensed in books and magazines, that had been missing so far, was encapsulated in Pauline. She went back to looking at the dress. It obviously cost a fortune, as did all of her clothes.

‘It’s beautiful. I could never afford to buy something like this.’

‘Why don’t you try it on? You’re the same size as me.’

Lucy couldn’t resist it. She slipped off her tee-shirt and jeans, just keeping on her bra and pants. Pauline looked her up and down approvingly in a way that made her feel both a bit uncomfortable but flattered at the same time.

‘You’ve got a great figure; you should show it off better.’

‘Yes, well, thank you.’

She stepped into, and then pulled up the dress around her. Pauline fastened it up at the back, and then fitted it over her breasts. Lucy felt she touched her breasts rather more than was necessary, but did not demure.

‘Slip off your bra straps.’

Lucy did, and looked at herself in the mirror. She had to admit she looked good. It fitted her exactly. The décolletage showed off her breasts, amongst her better features, and with her long blonde hair hanging down over the silk, she looked really classy.

‘It’s made for you, Lucy. You know, once I’ve worn it a couple of times, I could give it to you.’

‘That’s kind of you, but it wouldn’t be the same as being the first person to wear it. You are so lucky, having so much money.’



Pauline started laughing, and seeing Lucy's puzzled face, sat down laughing all the more.

'There's no luck about having these clothes. I earn the money I use for my clothes.'

Lucy was amazed, and interested. Dressing well had always been her ambition; with her mother a single parent that had never been possible. Not that she blamed her mother: far from it. She knew she'd gone without new clothes to help Lucy with her music lessons, and tuition for Cambridge. And providing Lucy with clothes had always come before hers. And to be fair, Lucy was never dressed badly; it was just she was dressed from Matalan, instead of designer labels. And Lucy, despite her admiration, didn't really believe her. It just didn't add up.

'But we're not allowed to work during term time! And anyway, you can't earn the money to buy those clothes in a bar or burger joint.'

'Oh no, there's a source of much better money than that, but it is a bit daring. Not for goody-goodies who always play by the rules.'

'You mean stealing?'

'No, silly, it's not illegal, but it is a bit daring. You could do it too, if you're up for it.'

'So what is it? Tell me!'

Pauline smiled at Lucy's enthusiasm. This was going to be so easy. She thought as soon as she met Lucy that she would be an ideal candidate. But there was no reason to rush. She wanted to reel her in nice and slowly, so she didn't even realise she was hooked.

'Not so fast. One of these days I'll tell you what it is. But I have to finish unpacking; I need a shower after all this excitement.'

She took the hint. Back in her own room, Lucy unpacked with an enthusiasm she would not have imagined was possible

an hour ago. The meeting with Pauline had transformed her mood, and suddenly the college seemed a romantic dream come true again. Even hanging up her dull selection of clothes in contrast to Pauline, Lucy felt optimistic. Hadn't Pauline said she earned the money for her lovely wardrobe, and didn't she say Lucy could do the same? Of course, that might all be bullshit, but Pauline didn't strike her as a girl who fantasised, and the clothes were there. What could the way of affording them be? A slight niggling doubt crept in; could it be something really dodgy? But then, she mused, Pauline was such a classy girl, she wouldn't be involved in anything like that, would she? Content with that thought, Lucy finished her unpacking, and thought about what came next. Matriculation at three o'clock, whatever that was.

After the departure of Lucy, Pauline decided to take a shower. To her horror, she suddenly realised there was no en-suite facilities. Of course, this was a Victorian building; there wouldn't be any, would there? Looking in her information pack she found that the bathroom was on the floor below. She decided to reconnoitre the bathroom first before unpacking. It was easy to find. It looked as if it was occupied, but as she approached it a tall, dark haired woman came out, wrapped in a kimono like robe. She was thirty something, obviously not a student. She smiled briefly at Pauline, and said good morning, but hurried on, not stopping to ask Pauline who she was, or identify herself. She looked vaguely familiar to Pauline, and she guessed she might be the tutor on the blackboard below. Pauline went into the bathroom, still warm and steamy from the last occupant, and smelling vaguely of some bath oil or other. The room was somewhat Spartan, high ceilinged with a single frosted window, white painted, but otherwise bare, with just a cork mat on the floor as furniture. It had a deep old cast iron bath that looked as

if it had been there since the staircase was built. There was nowhere to hang clothes though.

*'Typical of an ex-men's college. I'll have to put on my gown.'* thought Pauline.

She started to fill the bath, and then went back to her room, grabbing a towel. She slipped on her robe, a healthy tip having ensured the porters had already arranged for her trunk to be brought up, and went back to the bathroom. As she observed the deep expanse of steaming water, she realised just how much she needed the bath. The day was catching up on her, all the packing, the journey, getting her trunk unpacked. And the weekend hadn't helped. She'd had little sleep; not that that worried her too much. In fact, quite the reverse; she looked back on it with pleasure. It wasn't everyone who got to the Duke of Porchester's week-end party. And the boys she'd met there; they had been such fun, she thought, as she luxuriated in the steamy water. What cards! Whether she would have been so entranced if they had not been the son of a duke or the brother of an earl though was debatable. Pauline felt she should by right be part of the aristocracy, and indeed often behaved as if she was, even though her father was in fact a bookmaker. But she didn't intend to let such a detail impede her path of upward mobility. Certainly not! That could be glossed over, as could how she came to be at the party. If the Duke and Duchess of Porchester knew how that happened they wouldn't be best pleased, she thought. She smiled knowingly as she ducked deeper into the trough, and with her foot encouraged a further stream of hot bubbling water to seek out her body.

She was so engrossed in her reverie that she didn't hear the bathroom door opening. She just got a feeling she was being watched, and turned her head. Then quite involuntarily, she let out a shriek. There, framed in the open door, was a boy. To her

horror, Pauline realised, as she rapidly fast-tracked back through her memory, that locking the door of the bathroom was not on it. It was too late to remedy that now, or to curse the absence of an en-suite, the use of which in the past undoubtedly had led her into bad habits regarding door locking.

Whilst she ran these ideas through her brain, the boy stood open-mouthed in the doorway, his eyes transfixed on her body. She was about to cover the vital areas with her hands when she realised how embarrassed that would make her look. Pauline didn't believe in being embarrassed, she liked to think she epitomised 'cool'. Nothing ever fazed her, and she never believed in being at a disadvantage with anybody. Besides, he had already seen enough, and she wasn't ashamed of her body, how could she be? So she stared him out, and was pleased to see him look away, quite red-faced. He was, she had to admit, quite handsome in a Mediterranean kind of way: black hair, not just on his head as she could see, as he just had a brief towel wrapped round his waist. A nice figure, firm muscles, but slim and well-proportioned, with an open, rather cheeky face, wide, kissable lips, and sparkling brown eyes. Quite what her mother would have called a matinee idol, she thought.

'Enjoying the view? Never seen anyone in a bath before? It's not very gentlemanly to stare like that, is it?'

'I'm really sorry, I didn't realise someone was already in here. You should have locked the door, you know.'

'I know I should. Now please leave me in peace.'

He withdrew in some confusion, and Pauline jumped out and locked the door as soon as he had gone.

It had seemed like ages that he had been in the bathroom, but in fact of course it was only seconds. Though slightly embarrassed, David looked on the encounter more with pleasure than regret. His first day, and already he had seen a very pretty

girl absolutely starkers. He had seen naked girls before, of course, but none so attractive. The last girl had looked great in her make-up and designer clothes, but undressed had been pasty skinned, with acne. And she had been embarrassed about being naked, even in his bedroom with his parents out.

But this girl had not even blinked an eyelid. Were all the girls as cool as that? He had entered his room about half an hour before, and without thinking further had stripped off and tied a towel around himself to have a bath. It had not occurred to him that someone else might have the same idea, though it was pretty obvious now. Still, the girl should have locked the door, shouldn't she? He decided to wait a bit, and retreated to his room, to lie on his bed, and think on what he'd seen: the firm, tanned breasts, the long athletic legs. He was soon lost in a fantasy, in which the girl in the bath played an active and unexpurgated role.