

# *Persuade Me*

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First published 2009 by Choc Lit PO Box 516, Harpenden, AL5 9EP

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ISBN-978-1-906931-21-6

## Prologue

She took a deep breath. ‘So, who’ve you been dreaming about?’

He frowned, picked up the last pair of new shirts, still in their cellophane wrapping, and forced them into the suitcase. ‘What do you mean?’

She bit her lip. Perhaps she shouldn’t have mentioned it; not when he was about to leave for the airport. And yet ...

Another deep breath. ‘You’ve been calling out to someone in your sleep, a woman. I didn’t think that much about it at first, but now it’s been three nights in a row.’

He froze in the act of snapping the suitcase shut. Then he looked across at her, his face expressionless. ‘What did I say?’

‘You said “Anne”, over and over again. And you sounded so different, so gentle, as if – as if – ’ It hurt to breathe and she could feel tears scratching at the back of her eyes, but she had to know. ‘Who’s Anne?’

Silence ... and the strangest feeling that he’d already left; that he was far away, with someone else.

‘Rick, who is she?’

He tore his gaze from hers, finished locking the case and swung it off the bed onto the floor. ‘I don’t know anyone called Anne,’ he said, and his voice wasn’t gentle at all.

She stepped forward and grabbed his arm. ‘Is she in England? Is that why you’re going back there all of a sudden?’

He stared down at her with barely disguised impatience. ‘It’s not sudden, as you very well know. It takes months to organise a book tour on the other side of the world. And Sophie’s been on at me to visit for ages. She and Ed can’t afford any more trips over here.’

‘But what about your research?’ Her voice was shrill and resentful, just when she needed to be calm and controlled. ‘You can’t study your precious sea dragons in the depths of Somerset, or wherever your sister’s bought her crummy little garden centre.’

He sighed, framed her face in his hands and tilted it up towards him. ‘I know. So I’ll be coming back. To the sea dragons – to my life in Australia.’

Hardly a profession of love, but it was better than nothing. She wanted so much to believe him.

About coming back. And about not knowing anyone called Anne.

## Chapter One

### *Anna Karenina*

Would you give up everything in your life – your family, your friends, your place at this university – for your lover?

Anna Karenina did. She ignored the advice of her closest friends and left everything she had – husband, child and social position – for Vronsky. When it all went wrong, she threw herself under a train.

Tragic heroine – or selfish fool?

(Opening of Anna Elliot's lecture to first-year students on *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy)

He made the headlines, naturally.

On Saturday morning, in the neat privacy of her little flat, Anna read them all; from *The Sun*'s 'Sex-in-the-Sea Doc Comes Home' to the more sedate 'Celebrity Scientist on UK Book Tour' in *The Times*.

To her shame, it was the article in *The Sun* that she lingered over. It had the most detail, real or imagined, about Dr Rick Wentworth: a description of his girlfriend, the Australian supermodel Shelley McCourt, in tears as he left for the airport; an interview with a woman on the same flight, featuring some banter about asking him to join the Mile High Club – an invitation he'd apparently refused; his little altercation at Heathrow with a TV reporter who'd had the temerity to question something in his research.

And *The Sun* had the best photo of him – sitting on the deck of a boat, studying some small creature cradled in the palm of his hand, his expression intent yet relaxed, as though he didn't want to be anywhere else in the whole wide world. It was a look she'd known well, once upon a time.

She let out a long breath. If she wanted to, she could meet him again. He was coming to Bath for a book signing on the third Saturday in October. She could see it now: she'd be waiting in line, counting the minutes that brought them closer and closer, full of dread yet unable to tear herself away. At last, it would be her turn and she'd stand awkwardly in front of the table as he opened another copy of *Sex in the Sea*. Head down, pen poised, he'd ask 'Name?' and she'd whisper 'Anna Elliot'. Then that sleek blond head would snap up and ...

But at this point the picture became blurred. Would he force a smile and write 'To Anna from Rick' as if she was just another of his fans? Or would he jump up, send table and books flying, and carry on where they'd left off all those years ago?

If that happened, it would be an ugly scene. Anger and recriminations on his part, tears and resentment on hers – which would probably do his book sales no good at all. And book sales were the main reason he was here; that much was obvious from all the newspapers she'd read this morning. He'd be off to Australia again as soon as the book tour was over and the only people he'd be visiting in England were his sister and her husband. No mention of looking up the girl he'd once begged to sail with him to the other side of the world.

A knock at the door made her start. What if ... ? She gave a rueful smile. Silly to think, even for a split second, that it could be him; he neither knew nor cared where she was. She got to her feet, scooped up all the newspapers except *The Times* and stuffed them behind the sofa.

It was Jenny, her landlady; more than that now – her best friend. She breezed past Anna into the living room. 'Just seeing if you want me to get you anything at the shops, you're off to Kellynch soon, aren't you? And I thought we could eat together tomorrow night – unless you've got something else planned?'

They both knew she hadn't, but Jenny still hoped.

'Yes, I'd love to eat with you,' Anna said, 'and no, I don't need anything from the shops. I've already been out, to get a paper.'

Jenny glanced over at the table where *The Times* was spread out next to a solitary mug and an empty cereal bowl. 'Isn't that Rick Wentworth? Did you know he's doing a book signing here next month? I thought we could both go, but we'd need to be there early – I bet half of Bath will turn up, the female half at least.'

Anna managed a laugh. 'Yes, his marketing's spot on, isn't it? Good-looking bloke writes a book called *Sex in the Sea* and appears half-naked on the cover – I'm sure quite a few people will be disappointed to find they've bought a detailed study on the breeding habits of sea slugs and the like.'

'Nice cover photo, though.' Jenny picked up the paper. 'What my Aunt Jane would call a fine specimen of manhood. D'you think he'll sign our books dressed like that? We can but dream.'

Anna stared at the photo. Jenny would see a man sitting on a beach, in swimming trunks and a baseball cap, his back to the camera, long legs outstretched towards the sea, those tanned, broad, muscular shoulders proclaiming him as a fit outdoor type.

Whereas she ... she saw the restlessness that she'd found so attractive in him; head turned slightly to the side, his attention caught by the slightest of movements; arms and legs tensed, ready to launch him up off the sand; back – ah, his back ... how many times had she traced those muscles, with her fingers, with her lips? Too many times, yet never enough ...

Yes, this photo could easily have been her favourite, but it didn't show his face. She'd loved his face even more than his body. She used to sit watching him at work, waiting for his expression to change: one moment, still with concentration; the next – as she made some provocative remark – alive with laughter and, although she hadn't realised it at first, desire.

That's why she preferred the photo in *The Sun*. You could see his face, and imagine ...

'This is the man,' Jenny was saying, 'who almost made me get satellite TV, remember? That was the only way to see his documentary series, but you talked me out of it. Very sensible too, we need to economise and Tom watches enough TV as it is.' She gave a little sigh, her eyes still fixed on the newspaper. 'I'm sure they'll bring out a DVD soon, in the meantime the book will do nicely.' Then she giggled. 'It says here that he's a world expert on sea dragons. Sounds dangerous, doesn't it? They must be huge, although at least they can't breathe fire if they're under water!'

‘They’re tiny actually, I read somewhere that they’re related to the sea horse.’ To Anna’s relief, her voice sounded brisk and business-like. ‘Look, I’ve finished with the paper for now – why don’t you take it? Tell Tom I expect him to get all the Su Doku done, even the Killer, before I see him tomorrow.’ She glanced down at her watch. ‘I’d better get going or I’ll be late for our special family meeting and Walter will think I’m being disrespectful.’

Jenny pulled a face as she folded up the newspaper. ‘I’ll never understand why your father insists on you girls calling him by his Christian name, it’s not natural.’

‘But Jenny, as we know, *nothing* about my father is natural.’

And the two women burst out laughing.

Sir Walter Elliot ran an elegantly manicured fingertip over the faded gold lettering of his most treasured possession: *Burke’s Peerage & Baronetage*, 106<sup>th</sup> edition, Volume One. Published shortly after his wife’s death, it had become a trusty anchor in the storm-tossed sea of his life, a symbol of hope in a darkening world; a world where, increasingly, people worshipped the false god of celebrity in preference to the true and solid worth of an hereditary title.

And the 106<sup>th</sup> edition was The One That Mattered. He could still recall the moment, years ago, when he first saw the letter addressed to Sir Walter Elliot, Bt, on the silver post tray in the hall. Such a rare occurrence to see his name and title set out correctly. He was all too familiar with the feelings of revulsion inspired by ‘Sir Elliot’ or ‘Mr W. E. Baronet’, usually heralding a ‘never-to-be-repeated’ offer of a subscription to a so-called ‘expert’ genealogy magazine, or an ‘exclusive’ invitation to a timeshare development in Torremolinos. It had been Anna – the insensitive but practical one – who offered to give his details to the Mailing Preference Service, which would apparently protect him from these affronts to the family name.

The letter in question had been from Burke’s and it had extended its own exclusive invitation: an opportunity to review the proofs of his family’s entry in the forthcoming 106<sup>th</sup> edition. There had followed a long and occasionally frustrating correspondence; not with the minion who had originally been allocated to this important task, but – after much persistence – with the Editor himself.

And the outcome was more or less what Walter had wanted. He turned to the page where the red satin bookmark had taken up permanent residence and read the words he knew by heart: ‘SIR WALTER WILLIAM ELLIOT, 8TH BT, of Kellynch, Somerset; *b* 4<sup>th</sup> April 1950 ... *m* 1975 Irina Grigoryevna Petrova (*d* 1998), dau of Prince Grigori Ivanovich Petrov, of Paris, and has: Elisabeth Irina, *b* 1978; Anna Elena, *b* 1983; Mona Katerina, *b* 1984 ...’

He let out a little sigh of satisfaction. He had long regretted the absence of a son, but at least he could be proud of two of his daughters: Lisa, made in his own image, tall, golden-haired and utterly beautiful, the only one who understood him; and Mona, incomprehensibly freckled, something of a disappointment until she made quite a respectable marriage to Charles Musgrove and produced two fine sons. The Musgrove family might not possess a title, but they had two hundred hectares of prime farm land, a decent-sized manor house and generally clear complexions.

Which left Anna: small and dark and studious like her mother; but, unlike her mother, unable – or unwilling – to find a suitable man. And, since she’d started living with that Smith woman and her feckless husband, showing a rebellious streak that would no doubt manifest itself at the meeting today.

At times like this the 106<sup>th</sup> edition was of immense comfort to him. In two select volumes, it was the definitive record of his family's significance. Whilst Debrett's – with its alarming tendency to give precedence to rank – listed peers and baronets separately, Burke's had them gratifyingly intermingled in name order. Where else could Sir Walter Elliot, Baronet, rub shoulders with such a plethora of Dukes, Marquesses and Earls?

Purists might point out that there was a more recent edition, the 107<sup>th</sup>, but he always took great pains to tell them that it was an inferior publication. Entitled *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage*, it had grown to three volumes and almost five thousand pages – and it was not hard to see why. The addition of over three thousand knights and their families, even though they included his dear friend Minty, together with hordes of Scottish Feudal Barons and Irish Chiefs, was nothing short of a travesty. He had written several letters of complaint to the Editor but had yet to receive a satisfactory reply.

A car sweeping past the library window roused him from his reverie. That would be Minty; she always parked her vintage Rolls at the front of the house, where it was clearly visible from the main road. Like him, she was a stickler for appearances. In fact, they had so much in common that he found himself wondering why they'd never married. He could see several advantages in such an alliance. As the widow of a mere knight, she'd always been more than willing to defer to a baronet; she dressed with style and, as she often reminded him, on a far smaller budget than Lisa; and, from the far side of a dimly lit room, she could easily pass for thirty-five.

Then he remembered the downside. As his wife's closest friend and confidante, she had an unfortunate habit of imagining what 'dear Irina' would have thought about everything; her hair was as grey as dust and she refused to contemplate any sort of flattering rinse; what he called the necessities of life, she termed pure extravagance; and, last but by no means least, she was too old to bear him a son, a scenario that had suddenly become a distinct possibility, thanks to –

'Walter, *darling!*'

Minty, or Lady Russell to use her official title, somewhere behind him. He hadn't heard her come in, but he could smell her perfume – Je Reviens, meaning 'I'll be back'. Wasn't that a famous line from a film? He could vaguely recall the actor, a splendid figure of a man with an unfortunate guttural accent ... Yes, he reflected, dear Minty had been as good as her word, or rather her perfume's word; over the years she'd been back time and again to Kellynch, worldly wisdom and well-meant advice always at the ready.

He placed *Burke's* carefully on a nearby secretaire, got languidly to his feet and proffered a silk-smooth cheek for her kiss. 'Still wearing that old Jaeger jacket, Minty? It looks almost as good as new, you must tell me how you do it. I'm afraid I feel rather a wreck this morning, my masseuse phoned to say –'

'Masseuse?' Minty's eyes widened in horror, then narrowed; she had a deplorable lack of concern for crow's feet. 'Walter, we discussed this last time I was here and I'm sure you said you'd dispense with her services *immediately*. Imagine what dear Irina –'

He interrupted her with a sharp, 'She wouldn't have minded in the least.' He didn't stop to question the truth of this statement, but went on, 'As I was saying, my masseuse phoned to say she's delayed, so I'm not at my best. Which is a great pity, in view of the stressful nature of this meeting –' He broke off. 'That reminds me, Mona's not coming. The usual.'

Minty gave a little snort of derision. 'That girl needs a decent doctor or a firm husband, and she doesn't seem to have either. Heaven knows I've tried to tell her often enough, but I've lost all patience with her since she told me to keep my opinions to myself.' Her expression softened. 'Any sign of Anna?'

He went over to the window and peered out. 'No. She'd better not be late.' He glanced across at Minty defiantly. 'I'll be going for my massage as soon as Cleopatra arrives.'

She made a little moue of distaste. 'Cleopatra? Oh, the masseuse.'

'A real find,' he said, flexing his wrists. 'I feel ten years younger already. Lisa's started having her too, I'm sure you'll see a difference.'

As if on cue, the library door swung open and a slim, bronzed goddess in black leggings and a long cream cashmere sweater made her entrance. Lisa, his loveliest and most loving daughter. He gazed at her fondly as she glided over to Minty, kissed her lightly on the cheek and came to stand next to him.

'I've had a text from Cleo,' she said in a high, breathless, Marilyn Monroe voice that had shattered countless male hearts. 'She'll be here by half past, thank God.'

'Excellent, darling, let's make a start.'

Minty frowned. 'But it's only ten to, and Anna's not –'

'You can tell her what she's missed,' he said firmly.

Then, like a pair of synchronised swimmers, he and Lisa crossed to the sofa facing the window and sank gracefully into it, while Minty perched on a high-backed chair opposite.

Walter cleared his throat and began, 'As you both know, I take my responsibilities very seriously, very seriously indeed. *Noblesse oblige* is my way of life. And so, as we approach another recession, I feel I must set an example and be even more of a shining light in these dark times. I've accepted –'

He broke off in irritation as the door opened barely a foot and a woman edged into the room; a woman so like Irina that it hurt, ever so briefly.

And that low husky voice, so like Irina's. 'Sorry I'm late –'

'You're not, Anna dear, Walter started early.' Minty patted the chair next to hers.

His other daughters would have come straight over and kissed him, but not Anna. He watched her sit down beside Minty and rub her temples, as if the very sight of him produced a headache. Not that it bothered him; the antipathy was entirely mutual, had been for years ...

He cleared his throat. 'As I was saying, I've accepted an offer that will bring in a substantial amount of income over the next year and allow me to finance the necessities of life.' He paused, while the three women stared at him with varying degrees of apprehension. Then he continued in a louder tone, as if to quell any thoughts of insubordination, 'I've been approached by the couple who've bought Graham Farley's garden centre. To make a proper go of it, they need to rent more greenhouse space and they'd also prefer to live off the premises, but not too far away. I'm sure you'll agree that Kellynch meets their requirements admirably.'

Lisa's hand flew to her mouth. 'You're not suggesting they live *here*, with us?'

He smiled his reassurance. 'Of course not, darling, I'm thinking of the Lodge.'

'The Lodge?' Minty's jaw dropped, rather unattractively. 'But Walter, it needs lots of work doing to it, and you may not recover the cost of that in the rental, especially if the business fails and they only stay a few months. Who are these people anyway? What if they bring ...' – her eyebrows straggled upwards – '... an undesirable element to Kellynch?'

Walter spread his hands in an eloquent gesture of despair. 'I've thought long and hard about this, Minty, and talked it over with my professional advisors.' He put a tiny but audible emphasis on the word 'professional'. 'Shepherd feels that he can get away with the minimum of refurbishment and still charge the maximum rent. And the couple themselves, Sophie and Edward Croft, come with very solid references.'

Minty pursed her lips. 'Croft ... Croft ... I wonder if they're related to the Ashford Crofts?'

'I'll look it up in *Burke's*.' He reached towards the secretaire.

'They can't be,' she said hurriedly. 'I'd have heard about it from Tuppy if any of them were planning to run a garden centre.' She gave an expressive little shudder.

Walter withdrew his hand reluctantly. 'I've made my own enquiries, of course,' he went on. 'In Uppercross, where they're renting one of those poky cottages on the main street. Roger Musgrove thinks they're rather dull, but very pleasant and hard-working. He says things should liven up soon, the girl's expecting her brother from Australia. Somebody quite famous apparently, a scientist who writes books, which sounds respectable enough. Except he's called Woolworth ... Woolworth ... Wasn't that the name of that young upstart we had to sort out in France, Minty?'

'Wentworth,' came a low voice.

Walter looked across at his middle daughter. 'Pardon me?'

'Rick Wentworth.'

He had to strain to catch her words. 'Speak up, anyone would think you couldn't bear to say his name.'

'That's hardly surprising, Walter, when you remember the circumstances,' Minty said crisply.

Walter allowed his lip to curl. He remembered the circumstances extremely well: the collar of his favourite Eton shirt twisted completely out of shape as the young upstart hissed some very unsavoury words in his ear. 'Well, if it's the same man, which I doubt, we'll have to hope he's mended his arrogant ways. But in any case I'm not renting anything to *him*, just his sister. Everything's signed and the builders are starting work on the Lodge next week, which is why I wanted you all to know.' He gave Anna an accusing look. 'Are you sure it wasn't Woolworth?'

Anna made no answer; it was taking all her self-control not to run out of the room. She stared down at her lap, outwardly composed but secretly chasing wild thoughts around in her head.

A famous scientist who wrote books ... from Australia ... a sister called Sophie. It must be him. He'd talked about Sophie, all those years ago ... To think that his sister would be living in the Lodge and running the garden centre on the main road between here and Uppercross ... She decided she would make an effort to meet her. It would be – interesting. And it couldn't possibly be as bad as meeting *him*.

Her father was saying, ' ... At Cleopatra's recommendation, of course. An excellent place for the more advanced treatments, a sort of revival of its former glory days as a spa town. And I won't be too far away if there's anything to sort out at Kellynch, which there usually is.' He paused and gave a little sigh.

Anna closed her eyes; she knew perfectly well what was coming next.

'*Noblesse oblige*,' he murmured, savouring the words like nectar. '*Noblesse oblige*.'

Then Minty said, 'At least you'll see a lot more of Anna.'

Anna looked up, blinking in confusion. Was her father moving to Bath? The blood drained from her face.

Minty went on, warming to her task, 'You could even see if Anna's landlady has any spare rooms, her rates are very reasonable.'

Anna's confusion turned to undisguised horror.

Walter didn't appear to notice. He glanced impatiently at his watch, stood up and crossed the room to the large ormolu mirror over the fireplace. 'Probably ... ' – he paused to study his reflection from several angles – ' ... not Lisa and I will have such a full schedule – treatments, shopping, entertaining. We need to be in the centre of things, not out on that ghastly hill near the

University.’ He turned to Lisa with a brilliant smile. ‘Which is why I’ve taken a suite at a rather exclusive little hotel in The Crescent.’

‘I should bloody well hope so,’ Lisa muttered. ‘If we have to go to Bath and not London, then I’m certainly not slumming it.’

Anna felt her shoulders relax. The Crescent, no less. Little chance of their paths crossing, some recompense for the knowledge that Walter and Lisa would be parading themselves around Bath like ‘C’ list celebrities.

‘A suite?’ Minty leaned forward and glared at Walter. ‘I’m astonished that you’re even considering it when you’ve still got the upkeep of this enormous house. The rent from the Lodge won’t cover the cost of a *suite*.’

Walter ignored her and fixed his cold blue eyes on Anna. ‘We will, of course, expect to see you occasionally. While you’ve got the opportunity, you should leave those Smiths to their boring little life and mix with your own kind.’

Anna smiled sweetly at him. ‘Thanks, but I’ve always felt Jenny and Tom *are* my own kind so I’m perfectly happy as I am.’ She had no intention of changing her safe, comfortable routine for anyone, least of all her father. It had been years since she’d let his bullying – there was no other word for it – affect her.

‘Here’s Cleo now, coming up the drive.’ Lisa got abruptly to her feet. ‘She can do me first, I’ve a hair appointment at one. Party at Pen’s tonight.’ She added, in Anna’s direction, ‘They won’t mind if you tag along. You can do the driving, I’ll be having a few drinks.’

Just as Anna opened her mouth to object, Walter intervened. ‘I’m afraid she’s wanted at Uppercross, darling Mona’s not well and it’s Harvest Festival tomorrow morning at St Stephen’s, someone has to take the boys and Charles is off fishing as usual.’ He turned to Anna. ‘And you really need to be there this afternoon to make their harvest baskets. It’s a dinosaur theme, nothing too taxing.’

Anna weighed up her options. Stay at Kellynch and have Lisa throwing a tantrum if she refused to act as her chauffeur. Or go to Uppercross and witness Mona’s wall-to-wall misery. But Mona had two redeeming features: Charlie, five, and Harry, almost three. And there’d be no chance of Rick Wentworth visiting his sister because he was starting his book tour in London and had two solid days of signings arranged.

She looked straight at her father. ‘I’ll go where I’m wanted, then.’

In the back seat of the Jaguar, Rick Wentworth slumped against the cool leather upholstery and enjoyed his first scowl of the day. What a prospect – another twenty or so events like this, up and down the country. He felt drained; was it the long flight, or the effort of being pleasant for five hours at a stretch?

He became vaguely aware of his publicist’s irritatingly chirpy voice. ‘... Great boost to sales having you over here in person. I mean, look at today, hundreds of women in some sort of frenzy. If that’s going to happen each time, you’ll need bodyguards ... What shall we do tonight? Dinner at your hotel, or that party I told you about?’

Rick pretended to consult his mobile. ‘Neither. My sister’s sent me a message. She needs to see me urgently, so I’ll pick up a few things from the hotel and get on my way. You did say the car and driver are at my disposal, didn’t you?’

Sam’s face fell. ‘But there’s loads to talk about, and you’ve got to be at Charing Cross Road for two o’clock tomorrow, quite a trek from Suffolk.’

‘That’s the driver’s problem, not mine. And it’s Somerset, not Suffolk.’ Rick closed his eyes to discourage further conversation. He’d get rid of Sam, then ring Sophie. He hoped she’d be at home for the evening, but it didn’t matter if she wasn’t. All he wanted was to unwind for a few hours, in a place where no one was watching his every move. Not much to ask, was it?

It all worked out perfectly. Sophie was ecstatic at the prospect of seeing him a few days ahead of schedule. She and Ed had planned a quiet dinner at home, but the meal could easily stretch to three. Or four – what about his driver? Rick said no, Dave would sort himself out, but if she could book him a bed at some local pub ... As for him, the prodigal brother, he’d rather keep a low profile – so could she put him up at her cottage for the night? The sofa would be fine, even the floor.

She’d done better than that, although not much. The cottage had a small second bedroom with a single bed and a lumpy mattress, a far cry from his plush hotel in London. But he’d drunk too much to notice and he’d had too good a time to care.

He left promptly at eleven the next morning, after a slap-up breakfast and more laughter. He felt relaxed, almost happy. When Dave arrived with the car, he got into the front seat beside him, ready to chat, even cracking a joke.

The Jaguar cruised along the main street. It was empty – except for a woman with two little boys half-running towards the church, obviously late for the service. She was holding the smaller one’s hand and clutching something to her, while the other boy skipped along in front carrying a most peculiar object – like a little makeshift cardboard dragon. The next minute, predictably, he dropped it. It split open – or was that thing with brown spines sticking up some sort of lid? – and disgorged its contents far and wide. Three bright green apples tumbled into the gutter, plums scattered and squashed under the boy’s dancing feet, a banana landed awkwardly in a pile of damp leaves.

The car drew near. Rick heard the inevitable wail as the boy realised what had happened and looked to his mother for a miracle. The woman ignored the spilled, spoiled fruit and bent to offer comfort. Rick’s mouth twisted into an unpleasant smile. How touching. His own mother would have boxed his ears and walked on ...

Then, as the woman straightened up, a stab of recognition. The hair was longer than before, the face paler and thinner, but the resemblance was uncanny.

And so the memories came flooding back; not erased, as he’d thought – or wanted to think – but safely stored, stored for eight whole years. What he was looking at now, and what he’d filed away to forget, matched. Perfectly.

Dave slowed the car, as if debating whether to stop and help.

Rick found his voice. ‘Drive on. Drive *on*.’