

Prologue

They lay in each other's arms – neither wanted it to be over. For a long time they said nothing...there was just silence. Nothing else mattered, it was just them – finally, she spoke.

'So...is this it?'

'Yes! It has to be...you KNOW that.'

'Well...YOU decided.'

'Please don't make this difficult! You know how complicated things could get!'

She didn't reply – knowing that arguing was futile.

They just lay there – wondering what the future held.

Spring

Chapter One

Katie Charles raced out in the sunshine - FINALLY! No-more school! She headed towards the Café where her friend was waiting.

‘That’s it! No more school!’

Her friend, Amy, grinned. ‘No! Finally we get to have a rest!’

‘Yeah! Until we start Uni that is!’

‘Oh getting ready to go to Uni are we?’

She turned round to see Lewis Graham smirking. ‘Oh get lost Graham!’

He smiled. ‘Sure! I’ll leave you to your creativity...wouldn’t want you to lose your “potential.”

‘What a jerk!’

‘Yeah! I can promise you one thing...I’ll be glad not to see him *again!*’

...

Katie was helping her mum with the shopping, as her mum was picking the carrots her hand fell on another’s.

‘Oh sorry!’

‘Oh no! My fault!’ The man added.

They stopped and smiled at each other

‘Oh you have *got* to be kidding me!’

Katie then shifted her gaze to see Lewis glaring at her. ‘Yeah! Small world!’

‘As if I don’t see enough of you at school!

The feeling’s mutual...trust me!’

‘Don’t you ever switch off?’

Well...I could ask you the same thing!'

He smiled. 'Well...don't worry – we'll be out of each other's...hair...' He paused

What's wrong now?'

She followed his gaze and saw their parents chatting and laughing. Oh great! This day could literally get no worse!

Chapter Two

In chemistry - two negatives make a positive...usually...

Katie came downstairs to hear her mother talking on the phone. ‘Um...yes! Yes, I’d love to! See you then!’

‘Everything alright Mum?’

She smiled. ‘Oh yes Darling! I’ve just given Greg a call...’

‘*Greg??!!*’

‘Yes! We’ve decided to go for a drink!’

‘Mum!!’ Katie groaned.

‘What? What’s the matter?’

‘Well...in case you haven’t noticed...his son and I don’t *exactly* get on!!’

‘And I wonder why that is...’ Her mother smiled.

‘What?? Are you saying...oh that’s ridiculous!’

‘Is it?’

‘Yes! Anyway! What good would it be if you are going out with his dad?’

Her mother fell silent...then she smiled. ‘I’m sure that everything will work itself out...these things usually do...’

‘Oi! Charles!’

Katie groaned as she turned to see Lewis storm towards her. ‘Graham! What a surprise!’

‘Never mind that! What the *hell* does your mother think she’s up to with my dad?’

‘Oh? *Right* mummy’s boy aren’t you?!’

‘That’s *not* what I meant! They’re going out again!’

‘What do you want *me* to do?’

‘Maybe dissuade them? I mean we all know your mother could *never* be good enough for my father!’

She stared at him. ‘Meaning??’

‘Well! Look at her track record! I mean, granted I don’t know the ins and outs but whatever it was obviously made your father run for the hills as fast as he could!’

‘How...*dare* you!!’ Her face was as white as a sheet. ‘For your information - your dad would be lucky to have someone like my mum! She’s warm and caring!’

‘Obviously not to your father though eh?’

‘Well...there is generally no control when somebody else has a car crash!!’

The whole Cafe had stopped and silence fell - for Lewis - time stopped altogether and he just wanted the ground to swallow him up. ‘Katie...I-’

She grabbed her milkshake...tears in her eyes. ‘Just forget it! Most apologies are meaningless when they come from *bullies*!’

When he got home - Lewis rushed up to his room and threw himself on his bed - literally nothing could make him feel as bad as he did right there and then.

‘Are you sure you’re alright darling?’

‘Yes Mum! I’m fine!’

Her mother finished applying her makeup and turned round. ‘How do I look?’

‘You look amazing!’

‘Hey!’ She came and sat down on the bed next to her daughter. ‘This doesn’t change anything you know...I still love your father.’

‘Mum, it’s been four years - don’t worry about it.’

‘You know - I think about him all the time - when he died I thought that would be it.’

‘Greg seems like a nice man - You should just be happy.’

She smiled and looked at her watch. 'Oh! Goodness! He'll be here any minute.'

'You go and enjoy yourself Mum.'

'Why don't I ask him to bring Lewis over? You two could-'

'Mum!'

'Sorry...quite right...you two have to sort it out by yourselves...I won't be late. Don't over-indulge on the takeaway.'

'What's wrong with a family sized pizza and large milkshake?'

Suddenly she heard the doorbell go.

'Oh that'll be him! Bye Darling!'

Katie heard talking and then she heard her mother say. 'Oh how lovely! Yes! Go through! I think she's just ordered pizza.' Then she heard a man's voice. '*Behave!*' Oh God! *Please* say this is a joke!!

'Hiya!'

She looked up and saw Lewis smiling slightly at her.

'What are **YOU** doing here?'

'Dad thought it might be a good idea for me to pop round... keep you company!'

'I don't need company in my own house!'

He stared at her. 'Alright! Dad made me apologise. I'm sorry for what I said about your dad.'

'Forget it! You done?'

'No look! I had no idea!'

She shrugged. 'Well...why would you?'

'Did they catch the person responsible?'

'The person had right of way and, although he had been drinking, wasn't over the limit.'

Lewis stared at her. 'I'm sorry!'

'Yeah... well! These things happen.'

He paused. 'My mum, you know...she just got a better offer...'

Katie stared at him. 'She just *left*?"

'Yeah - she just got bored! That's why I don't really trust anyone.'

'I'm sorry!'

'Look...why don't we just agree that we don't have to like each other...'

'...We just need to tolerate each other for our parents' sakes?"

'Yeah! Don't get me wrong - I still think Dad could do better...'

'You know - I don't think *either* of our parents could do better to be fair...'

He paused. 'Yes...you're probably right.'

'So...where do we go from here?'

'Well...since we're going to be in each other's lives a lot - how about being civil and just tolerating each other?"

'Works for me!' Suddenly the doorbell went - Katie smiled. 'Pizza!' she paused.

'You're very welcome to overindulge with me... you know... if you'd like...'

'Great!' Lewis smiled. This could work...he had no intention whatsoever of hanging around her and he was convinced that she didn't either but maybe they could just about make this whole thing bearable.

Chapter Three

‘So...how’s the potential prodigal step-mother coming along?’

‘Oh shut up!’

‘What? I’m genuinely interested!’

‘Well...I don’t want to talk about it!’

‘Oh! No...Of course not! Because you’d have that wet, stupid little girl as a step-sister.’

‘Exactly!’ Lewis sipped his milkshake.

‘Well...I feel for you mate! Someone who you can’t stand to be around and suddenly you’re thrown together.’

‘You don’t have to rub it in!’

‘So...What are you going to do?’

He shrugged. ‘What CAN I do?’

His friend flung an arm around his shoulders. ‘Oh mate! I really feel for you!’

‘Kate...look, we don’t have to come here...’

Katie shook her head. ‘I’ve got every right to be here as much as HE does!’

Her friend nodded. ‘Of course! But don’t give him what he wants.’

‘Look...actually...he may not be as bad as you think...’

‘Are you serious?’

‘Well...when our parents went out for a meal...we had a takeaway and...’

‘And??’

‘And...well...I don’t know...it was nice...we spoke...we got to know each other...’

‘Are you *serious*??’

‘Yes! So maybe...just maybe...’

‘So...why don’t you go over to him?’

‘Oh...he’s with his mates...’

‘So? he won’t mind...’

‘Well...I don’t know...’

‘Go on!!’

Lewis looked up and shuddered oh god! *Please* tell him this wasn’t happening! She was approaching them. His brain went into panic mode.

She smiled. ‘Hi!’

‘What do *you* want?’

Taken aback by his cold manner, Katie pushed on. ‘Oh nothing...I thought I’d just say hi!’

His friend flung an arm around his shoulders and mimicked her. ‘Oh? You just thought you’d say “Hi!” Why don’t you get lost? Lewis is suffering enough without having to worry about you invading his social circle as well!’

Lewis hated the look on his face and was desperate to say something...but he couldn’t, instead...for some unknown reason. This came out of his mouth. ‘Look, we’ve nothing to say to each other...just get lost.’ He was desperately trying to ignore the look of hurt on her face.

‘But why don’t you want to come sweetheart?’

‘I’m sorry Mum! I’m just not feeling well.’

‘But it’s a family occasion!’

‘Yes...well, they’re not my family!’

Katie’s mum looked disappointed. ‘Darling! Things are going really well and we’ve been invited out for a meal! Come on! You’ll enjoy it! You can order extra chips and

have a Knickerbocker Glory for dessert!'

'I don't feel like it Mum! Anyway...this should be a private meal for the two of you!'

'Oh don't be ridiculous! We're hardly teenagers anymore!'

'Look, Mum, I really don't think it's a good idea...'

'Why? Is this something to do with Lewis?'

'Lewis??? No! Why should it?'

'Well...if it is...you know that he likes you really...it's just the hormones...'

'Mum! Look; he and I are never going to get along...we will be civil...but that's it! I'm sorry...'

She looked up and hated the look of disappointment in her eyes. 'Well...next time then perhaps?'

'Yes! Perhaps!'

'I'll see you later.'

'Yes! Have a nice evening...' Katie watched her mum go...feeling a twinge of guilt.

It was a glorious Saturday and Katie was sitting under a tree, just aimlessly playing with her chocolate milkshake.

'Ah! So *there* you are!'

She looked up. 'Piss off Graham!'

'Charming! I've got a bone to pick with you!'

'Well...interestingly enough - I've got *nothing* to say to you!'

'You weren't at dinner the other night!'

'Why? Were you?'

'Yes! You wouldn't believe the stick I got afterwards!'

She stared at him. 'What are you on about?'

‘I’m talking about my father accusing me of scaring you off!’

‘Excuse me??’

‘You heard!’

‘So...just because I didn’t feel like attending dinner...you’re attacking *me* for making *you* look bad??’

‘Absolutely!’

‘Oh grow up! It’s not all about you!’

‘You’re a fine one to talk!’

She glared at him. ‘How *dare* you!! I have been nothing but supportive of my mother and your father because, and I know this may be a weird concept for you, I *actually* think about someone else other than myself. To be absolutely honest - there are a *thousand* other guys out there who I’d rather have as a prospective step-brother than a bully like you! I mean *WHY*, *why* on earth do you hate me so much?? What have I ever done to you??’

‘I don’t hate you!’

‘Yes you do!’

‘Don’t be stupid!’

‘Seriously!! What *IS* your problem?’

‘Just drop it Charles!’

‘No I won’t bloody drop it! Come on! Tell me! *What is it?!*’

‘I’m warning you...’

‘Or what? Come on...what??’

‘Oh for *GOD’S sake!*’

Suddenly, without warning, he kissed her, and, in that exact moment...everything changed.

