

After

Helen parks her two-year-old Ford Fiesta (dark blue, low mileage, immaculate when she got it although it could do with a good clean now) and looks around for a ticket machine. There doesn't seem to be one. *Fair enough. Haven't the Welsh cottoned on to charging for parking yet? They must be pretty relaxed about it. Not that there's been a great deal of traffic on the roads for the last seventy miles or so, and not that much here in Lampeter for that matter. But this is Saturday afternoon (although admittedly late; going on for a quarter to five) for goodness sake. Northallerton would be heaving. Where is everybody? Not been a nuclear war, has there? Oh well.*

She gathers up her bag, gets out, locks the door and looks around the square, which seems to be given over entirely to car parking, although it's barely a quarter full. It's pretty though; spick and span with small neat terraced houses ranged along three sides, their walls tricked out in various colours, like a paint sample card, some of them unapologetically strong. The house is on the north side of the square, Tomos said. Typical man! How the hell is she supposed to know which the north is? She doesn't carry a bloody compass around with her! But he also said, helpfully, that his little house is painted bright blue and that there'll probably be Mair's little red Citroen parked outside. Yes, there it is, to her left, almost directly in front of her. Blue house, red car. That must be it; it must surely be a unique combination of house, car colour and car make. Well, almost. Anyway, glancing around again, there's no other bright blue house to be seen.

She heads towards the house, already feeling a little nervous. *Surely Tomos didn't choose that colour himself, did he, she thinks, it's a touch on the excessive side.* She reaches the white plastic door, hesitates a moment, rings the bell.

It's only moments before the door is opened. A small slight blonde girl; black skinny jeans, big bottle-green jumper halfway down her thin thighs stands there, a questioning expression quickly giving way to broad grin.

'Helen?' she says, unnecessarily.

'The same!' Helen grins back. *This must be Mair. Seems nice. Very welcoming anyway.*

'Mair I take it?' She tries to pronounce the name properly, the way Tomos told her.

Mair seems uncertain whether to extend her hand for shaking or open her arms for a hug, so Helen takes the initiative and opens her own, embraces her and pecks a cheek. Well, she's sort of family, after all.

'Lovely to see you,' says Mair, 'I've heard so much about you.'

Then remembers herself. She becomes solemn. 'Er, I'm so sorry . . .' She flounders a little, searching for appropriate words.

'That's okay,' says Helen. 'I know; it's an odd sort of situation. You must have mixed up feelings about it. I'm getting over it, slowly, though.'

Mair says, relieved to be extricated from awkwardness, 'Anyway do come in; it's not very warm out here. Rain coming by the look of that sky.'

She backs into the room (the door opens directly into the snug, low-ceilinged lounge), allowing Helen in, as Tomos rises from the sofa and turns to greet her. It's only the third time she's seen him, actually, and there's the same jolt of surprise, of recognition. *God; you're so incredibly like your brother. I can never get over it. Well, apart from the long hair of course. Apart from that, so like Wayne. Now you're filling out, the sameness is even more pronounced.*

Tomos comes around the end of the sofa, arms open. *He's* not unsure as to the correct welcome, anyway. Helen embraces him. She's not sure how delicate he still is, but he seems remarkably strong, and his kiss on her cheek is generous. The embrace seems to last just slightly too long for propriety; teeters perilously close to the embarrassing, but then he pulls away. His familiar hazel eyes dance.

'Hello Helen. Thanks for coming. Great to see you.'

'And you too Tomos. You look really well.'

'Yes, and I feel it, thanks. A lot better than four months ago, that's for sure.'

'Good! I'm really pleased!'

He indicates the only other seating in the little room, a blue repp covered armchair. 'Sit down, please. Oh; sorry, let's take your coat.'

Helen drops her bag down by the armchair and unbuttons, removes her parka. He takes it from her and hands it to Mair ('Hang this up Cariad, you're nearer') who hangs it on the rack by the front door. She sinks down into the armchair as Tomos resumes his seat on the sofa. He's looking at her with that so-familiar, slightly lop-sided grin on his face. He's still not as beefy as Wayne

and perhaps never will be. But then poor Tomos is hardly in the Welsh rugby player bracket, far from it.

She relaxes back against the cushions. It's been a long journey. *This is all very comfy.* She smiles back at Tomos. *Look at you, sitting there in your blue sweater, looking almost muscular. Perhaps you will be, given time. You look as if nothing's happened, almost. There's a little colour in your cheeks. And you've got this nice little house. And Mair. Lucky you, Tomos.*

Then catches herself. *Well; lucky now anyway, but you certainly weren't before. It looks as if you're going to be fine, but you must have been through hell.*

Mair pipes up: 'Anyone for tea? Or coffee? What'll it be for you Helen?'

'Oh, tea, please Mair. I'm gasping. Milk, no sugar, thanks.'

Helen stretches her fur-lined (artificial of course) booted feet out in front of her, crossing them at her slightly thick ankles. She'd no idea what sort of weather to expect this far south, but it was still pretty parky back home and had decided to wear them just in case. Needn't have bothered as it's turned out, with the nice fire (well, gas-fired pretend woodstove, by the look of things). She might have to take them off in a bit. Tomos is still looking at her fixedly, still grinning. She almost wishes he'd stop; it's getting a little unnerving. But then the grin deserts his face. He's all solicitousness.

'And you're really okay, are you, Helen?'

Helen sighs; trots out the usual reassurance. 'Yes, I really am fine now Tomos. Can't rewrite the past. You're the one who matters now.'

Part one

Chapter 1

The Two of Me

Julie was determined to have a good Friday night out on this sultry evening in Liverpool in July, 1984. Cheer herself up a bit. It had been a bugger of a day really. The boss on her back all the time because she kept making mistakes with her typing. Three times He'd thrown it back at her for redoing and intimated not-too-subtly that if she didn't brighten up she'd be out.

So tonight it was clubbing. The pulsating lights, the throbbing noise, the booze, a little weed perhaps, the escapism. Every sort of intoxication. Wonderful! Everyday worries relegated to the back seat. They wouldn't entirely go away of course, but they could be ignored for a few happy hours of abandonment. Think about them again next Monday morning. She knew from past experience that it would be sweltering-hot in *Slinky's*, so she'd come suitably if sparingly dressed: her green neon tutu that was little more than a bum warmer, purple mesh top, red D-cup bra. No tights (too hot) and just for once no leg warmers, for the same reason.

With a bit of luck, that hunky bloke might be there again. He had been the previous two times, with his mates, spending much of their time ranged along the wall eyeing up everything female with varying degrees of approval. She'd tried to catch his eye and give him the come-on but wasn't sure whether he'd taken the hint. He certainly hadn't approached her, yet, anyway. Perhaps he never would. She knew she was no oil painting really (her only significant feature was her chest, but what advantage was a nice pair of knockers if you hadn't got the face to go with them?). She hated her red hair (although admittedly it was easy to change; it was currently blonde except at the roots); hated her freckles (made her look like a ten-year-old); hated her thick eyebrows and her wide pudgy nose. But she did her best; spent a good hour in

her bedsit putting on her face, trying to enhance nature's sparing legacy. You could only do what you could do. Perhaps the see-through top might do the trick. She'd deliberately slackened off her bra (it was giving virtually no support at all) so that she would bounce as spectacularly as possible when at maximum gyration. She would almost have been tempted to leave it off entirely, but knew she'd never get past the bouncers on the door, who would have denied her entrance but not before having a good ogle first.

Debbie and Sharon were already there, waiting outside, when she arrived tottering on her platforms. Stupid bloody shoes really, but it was what everyone wore, so you had to. Useless for dancing in really, so all you could do was stand there and bob up and down and sway and wave your arms around. Well, it didn't pretend to be ballroom dancing though, did it? Your feet killed you at the end of the night though. They headed in past the leering bouncers and paid at the kiosk, had a quick check in the Ladies to ensure no repair was needed, left their stuff at the cloakroom and hit the dance floor. It was busy tonight; the floor was crowded already, at the early hour of twenty to ten. What would it be like in a couple of hours' time? And as she'd predicted, it was sweltering. She could feel rivulets of sweat running down her back already. Thank the Holy Mother she wasn't wearing any more.

Madonna was going *Crazy For You* at high decibels as they nudged their way into the bobbing throng. Julie scanned the room. No sign of Mr Good Looking. She felt an irrational stab of disappointment. Still, it was early yet. He was probably still in the pub. Anyway, she needn't get her hopes up. Even if he did appear, he'd likely be as uninterested as before. Why in Heaven's name would he fancy her? She resigned herself to ending the night alone. Again.

But then, an hour and a half later, in the middle of Bruce Springsteen's *Born In The USA*, suddenly there he was, at the end of the room, by the farthest glitter ball, sitting in the raised purple-painted seating area. She hadn't been keeping her eyes peeled. But he didn't seem to be alone. There was a girl with him wearing a tiny pink puffy dress, multi-coloured glass beads and a trowelled-on application of mascara to complement her black perm-curved hair. They seemed to be engaged in earnest conversation. She couldn't hear what they were saying of course because of the distance and Bruce's high-octane paean to America. It did look to be a heated discussion though, judging by the mutual gesticulating.

Julie's supposition seemed to be proved correct when a minute later the girl suddenly slapped Handsome hard in the face, nearly sending him sprawling, came down the staircase and flounced with difficulty through the revellers, heading for the foyer. He watched her departing back for a moment, hand to cheek and mouthing what looked like very creative expletives, and then shrugged theatrically and turned to watch the sweaty carousing throng.

It was then that he spotted her. And to Julie's astonishment began to thread his way towards their little group. Towards her! As he came close she could take in his features properly for the first time. Quite tall; must be knocking on six foot. Broad shouldered; a bit on the swarthy side. Not unlike Brian Ferry, actually, with straight, as-good-as-black hair, sloe-black slightly piggy eyes and a rather long, somewhat aquiline nose. Julie was gratified to realise that he was only looking at her.

He was the first to speak, or rather shout.

'Hiya!'

'Hi!' Julie shouted back.

He wasn't so much looking at her as at her front. He seemed deeply fascinated by it, but then it *was* very mobile. 'You here alone then Luv!?'

Suddenly Julie wished she were. 'No, with my friends!'

She indicated Debbie and Sharon. He glanced at them briefly. They were no great beauties either, and lacked Julie's other attributes. But they knew the unspoken etiquette. If anyone looked as though there was a chance of being picked up, the others would discretely fade away. The girls did so now, moving away on the pretext of going in search of a drink, but not before casting envious glances at Julie and Handsome.

So the two of them were left together. He began to move rhythmically with the music, which had become Tina Turner's *We Don't Need A Hero*. He was good at it; he was a natural, moving easily and smoothly. He made Julie look wooden-footed and as if she had an extra one too.

'What's your name then Luv!?'

'Julie! You?'

'Paul!'

'Good name for Liverpool!'

'Yeah. Not as clever as him though!'

Julie was enchanted. This bloke was cool and droll with it. They danced until the end of the track and then Paul suggested a drink and a sit down. Julie was relieved; she was glad of it. She went up onto the dais to claim a seat as he went for the booze, returning with a pint for himself and lager for her. It was her fourth and she was beginning to feel pleasantly woozy. They sat and chatted, and he offered her a smoke, and she noticed with pleasure that he now spent at least as much time looking at her face as at her front. Julie felt she had to ask about his earlier companion.

‘What happened to your friend then?’

‘Oh, her? Sandra? Don’t think I’ll be seeing her again.’

‘Why not?’

He took her hand, gripping unnecessarily tightly. ‘Don’t ask, okay? The slag! It’s over.’ And with that he changed the subject.

He went for refills and came back with the same again for himself and a gin sling for her. Now Julie felt decidedly unsteady. The room was swimming; the noise oddly muffled, which was odd. Usually the decibels increased as the night wore on. She hoped she wasn’t going to puke.

Suddenly he surprised her by saying, ‘Jeez, hot in here innit it? He certainly looked as overheated as Julie felt, judging by the underarm sweat marks on his tee shirt, and he smelled none-too-sweet if she were honest. Not that she minded. It was animal; enticing.

‘Yeah; certainly is.’

‘Shall we go outside for a bit?’

‘That’d be good.’ Julie felt she’d pass out if they stayed in here much longer. She doubted whether she could string more than three words together coherently now anyway; she was in no fit state for conversation. Perhaps a little fresh air might help.

Paul finished his half-empty glass in one long gulp and looked at her expectantly. It seemed she had to do the same, and so she did. He got up and she rose, unsteadily, and he led her off the dais and along the side of the dance floor to the foyer. Debbie and Sharon were still dancing and gave her, grinning, the thumbs-up. There was nothing to collect from the cloaks except her bag, which she retrieved as, rather befuddled, she doubted that she would be returning inside.

They left the club, through the former-cinema double glass doors. The bouncers were looking the other way and Paul led her, tottering, into the alley at the side. Julie knew it well from previous experience; it led to the yard at the rear, a dark scruffy wasteland of bins, weeds, vomit and litter. They stopped at the farthest corner, by the last overflowing bin, and Julie sagged back against the grimy brick wall. Paul's hands were straight away on her shoulders, her sides, her flopping chest, cupping her face, all over her, his mouth rough and beery on hers, tongue forcing its way between her lips almost making her gag, but she wanted him, wanted to swallow him whole, take him right down inside. Or was it right *up* inside?

Now his hand was inside her skirt, cupping her bum. He clawed her knickers down, roughly down, bending to pull them tangled, snagging, over one shoe, leaving them hanging like a trophy around the other ankle. He returned his hand as a perch for her bottom and trusting him she sat and wrapped her plump white thighs around the small of his back. He was unzipped and his hot, engorged, urgent member into her before she had time to gasp, let alone say no. His free hand fumbled her top free from her waistband, snaked inside, slithering up hot damp flesh and pushing her loose bra up and aside and squeezing her liberated breast and tweaking her nipple hard, making her cry out in pain, cry out in ecstasy as he thrust hard, deep, in his lust and anger, anger at being thrown over by Sandra, until with an animal grunt he quickly came.

For Julie and Paul it was no more than one minute and forty-eight seconds of unbridled lust, quickly forgotten. They weren't to know that there was an ovum currently in Julie's left fallopian tube, being stroked sedately through to self-destruct in her uterus in due course. (She was never very aware of her menstrual cycle; her period always came as a bit of a surprise.) And Paul, who was even more clueless, wouldn't have known that not so long after taking her so forcefully, there would be hundreds of his spermatozoa milling and wriggling around that cell, each intent on entry, trying for a second microscopic penetration through that tough (for a spermatozoon anyway) membrane of the ovum. Or that one would succeed, to unite its incomplete package of chromosomes with the ovum's, pooling their particular and unique recipes of genes.

Neither would have realised that the resulting zygote was beginning its long miraculous journey to join the ranks of humankind; that it would divide, and divide again, and again. That it would complete the first leg of the journey and reach the temporary sanctuary of the womb. That it would divide yet again, but this time something rare and extraordinary would happen. Eight cells of the now sixteen would, for some inexplicable reason, declare independence and remove themselves fully from the others; take themselves off to begin a quite separate existence. There would be created mutual clones.

And the so vigorously copulating pair in the dingy yard behind Slinky's was quite unaware that the successful spermatozoon had been of the Y-type. The two tiny specks of potential humanity now anchored in the lining of Julie's uterus were monozygotic males.

Growing in her womb were identical twin brothers.

Of course Julie, at any rate, soon became only too aware that something was amiss. Even she knew what a period failing to appear meant. But surely it couldn't be. Could it? Okay; that first time had just happened. It was just one of those things. But after that, as the relationship developed (in Julie's eyes anyway, although Paul's interest didn't seem to extend much beyond three discrete parts of her body) they had always been careful to use rubbers.

At three weeks overdue, having confided her growing anxiety to Becky at work, she was persuaded to buy a home testing kit. She took it home that night, and read the instructions, and sat trying to summon up the courage to go to the bathroom (she couldn't wait until the best time, the following morning), putting it off and putting it off until she was nearly wetting herself, until finally with a thumping heart she screwed up her courage and tested her wee. And of course it changed to the colour she didn't want.

She didn't sleep that night. She wept, long and bitterly. She cursed herself over and over again. Why in the name of Jesus couldn't she have said no? It must have been that first time. Not very likely, true, but it could happen, so she'd heard. And it only needed one time, after all. But Paul had been so insistent; she couldn't have denied him, even if she'd wanted to, which she hadn't. Besides, there'd been a simmering anger in him that night; she could tell. To have refused him might only have resulted in rape.

But anyway; what now? The thought of motherhood was appalling. She knew only too well what a burden it had been for Mammy, bringing up nine children in that miserable little slum of a house in Sligo; Da coming in drunk most evenings and slapping her around (but then still screwing her of course), before he eventually walked out to shack up with a younger model, leaving her to cope alone. She remembered the nights after that; her mother's dead-eyed exhausted look; her siblings' frequent tetchy bickering; the constant red-faced bawling from six-month old brother Seamus, who could never be comforted. She'd been glad to get out of it after she'd left school and come to Liverpool to live with older sister Maeve, who paid for her to do a secretarial course, which was kind of her, but who then took up with a fella who wanted to move in and suddenly three became a crowd, and she had to leave and find her own crummy bedsit.

If those were the joys of motherhood, you could keep them. Besides, seventeen was much too young. She'd seen what being a young mum was like: Sharon's Kylie was one. She was only sixteen, poor kid, and had no life at all since dropping little Brett. Kids were great as long as they were someone else's. But then again; Kylie was a single mum. She had little support. On the other hand she herself had Paul. And he had quite a decent job, at Halewood making Land Rovers so he'd told her. He'd be a good provider. Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad after all. Yeah. He looked as though he might like kids, particularly one of his own. She'd phone him if she could, but for some unknown reason he wouldn't give her his phone number. Bit of a mystery man he was really! So she'd just have to wait until she saw him on Wednesday night for a drink or three; could tell him then after they'd had a few jars and then some energetic How's Your Father later at his flat, after which he'd be in a mellow mood. Hopefully.

Well that was the theory, anyway.

Paul, as always, enjoyed parts one and two of the planned programme. After she'd climbed sated and still trembling off him, disappointed as usual to feel his rapid flaccidity, and flopped down on her back as he reached for cigarettes for them both, she braced herself to bring up the subject. She turned and snuggled close to him, stroking the dark hair that began so soon below his collar bones.

'That was brilliant, you wicked man.'

'Well, gotta keep the ladies happy,' he preened, smugly.

'It really is a great way of making babies, don't you think?'

He stopped, cigarette halfway to mouth, and looked at her sharply. 'Waddya mean?'

'Well, you know; it's a lovely way to start things off.'

He was staring at her in alarm. 'But we aren't having one. That's what the Johnnies are for! What the fuck are you talking about?'

Julie felt her mouth go dry. 'But don't you think it would be nice?'

He removed his free arm from around her shoulder, crossly. 'No; of course I bloody don't!'

Julie felt a chill of alarm, as if the temperature had just dropped ten degrees. 'But what if we found we were having one?' Her voice had shrivelled; all confidence gone.

He was getting annoyed. 'But we aren't, you silly cow. Why are you going on about it?'

He paused. Half-realisation dawned. 'Hang on a minute. Are you trying to say . . .?'

'Yes.' Her voice was a whisper.

Paul sat up abruptly, pushing her roughly away; glared down at her.

'Oh Christ no! But how can you be? Fuck's sake!'

'It must have been that first time. I should never have let you!'

He snorted derisively. 'Oh come on; you were gagging for it. You led me on, dressed like that. You slut!'

'No Paul, no; I didn't! Really!' Her tears were flowing in a hot salty torrent now.

He watched her sob, dispassionately. There was no comforting hand on her shoulder or in her hair. There were no soft consoling words.

Eventually he spoke. 'Anyway; what are you going to do about it?'

'Do about it? What do you mean?' she asked; the questions tremulous between gasps.

'Well, get rid of it of course, what do you think?'

'But we'll get married, won't we?'

'Married?' He was incredulous. 'No of course we won't! I don't want to do that and I don't want your sprog either!'

'But it's ours! Yours too!'

'Well I don't bloody want it. Just get rid of it, okay?'

That set her off again. Hands palmed to eyes, face beetroot red, she wept as if her world were ending, completely abandoned to sorrow, all hope evaporated clean away.

Clumsily, belatedly, Paul tried mollification. He ruffled her hair. 'Ah, come on now Jules! What's so wrong with having it got rid of? It happens all the time.'

'No Paul,' she pleaded. 'No! I can't do that. I'm Catholic. It's a sin. No!'

He took his hand away, sneering again. 'Sin? You didn't find it such a mortal sin when you were fucking me did you? Don't make me laugh!' Although he did laugh, but it was bitter, not amused.

Julie had stopped crying again. She had no tears left; just a dull leaden resignation. 'No, I can't have an abortion. My mother would never forgive me. I'm sorry.'

'And it's my body anyway; I'll do what I want with it,' she added bravely.

There was a long silence, as he stared ahead and she buried her face in the pillow. Then he said, calmly, utterly cold, 'Okay then, yes, it's up to you. You can please yourself. Come on, get dressed. I'll take you home.'

And that was the last Julie saw of Paul.

He didn't ask to see her again when he dropped her back at her bedsit. At first she assumed – well, hoped – that he was just angry, or hadn't yet got over the shock of her surprise revelation, or both. He'd surely get over it in a week or two though? He couldn't desert her now. If he didn't want to get married, that was fine. She was okay with that. She didn't want him to feel any more trapped than he perhaps already did. Lots of people lived in sin, as Mammy would put it, nowadays.

But as the days went by, and then the weeks, he made no attempt to get in touch. She looked again in the phone book but he wasn't listed. Must be ex-directory. She started going to *Slinky's* again but he was never there, apart from one night when she saw him enter, have a long and careful look around, walk up onto the dais to get a better sweep, apparently spot her (although she couldn't be sure) and then make a hasty exit. She never saw him there again. She even, pathetically, took the bus to his flat one Saturday afternoon but his car wasn't parked outside, so she sat on his doorstep and waited for nearly

three hours until it appeared making its way down the street, but as it got close, instead of slowing down it suddenly accelerated instead and drove straight on past, his head facing resolutely forward. He must have seen her. She walked to the nearest bus top and made her disconsolate way home.

She began to accept that she'd lost him. She couldn't keep kidding herself that he'd suddenly appear, full of remorse for his rejection, and promise to stick by her come what may. She'd been such a stupid little fool. And now here she was, far from home with a kid on the way. How would she ever cope? She didn't even know whether, as a non-Brit, she'd be able to get Social and all the rest of it. But she could hardly turn up back home like the Prodigal Son (no, Daughter) with a baby in tow. Mammy would probably throw her straight out again. She wasn't the most forgiving of mothers.

And she'd never registered with a doctor. Well, she'd never needed to. Again, she wasn't sure if she could anyway, being Irish. Holy Mother of Jesus, what was she going to do? In desperation, she put scruples aside and found the name of a private clinic that did abortions and vasectomies and made an appointment. The doctor there, apparently from the Indian subcontinent, was very kind and examined her carefully and asked when she thought she might have conceived (she'd worked it out from the calendar so could tell him that to the day, anyway) and calculated from *his* calendar on his desk how many weeks gone she was, and seemed a bit surprised in view of the size of her belly, which was already looking quite conspicuously pregnant. He asked her if she was sure, and she said yes, but he still looked dubious.

He said that, judging by the size of her, she must be pretty much at the legal limit for terminations and he couldn't possibly exceed it on pain of losing his license or even being struck off, whatever that meant, but he could fit her in in three days time. Then he told her the fee, which was payable in advance, but she simply hadn't got that much money and told him so, and he said sorry; they weren't a charity and it seemed that her best course of action in that case would be to come to terms with the prospect of being an unmarried mother and possibly go back home to Ireland.

Yes, she thought, after she'd paid the fee for the consultation and walked back home because she was now skint (she'd thrown a sickie to explain her absence from work), perhaps he was right. That did seem the best, or at any rate least worst, option. Perhaps Mammy would be okay about it. And then

she wouldn't be going against the Church's teaching. Not in that respect, anyway.

But when, after the following payday (she wasn't too sure how many more there'd be; the boss was beginning to look at her waistline rather suspiciously) when she was back in funds and she summoned up the courage to phone home to Sligo, her hopes were dashed again. Mammy just hit the roof, calling her a tart, a little hussy, a disgrace to the family name, so she was. How could she possibly come back home? Whatever would the neighbours say? She'd had quite enough of being stigmatised herself already, so she had. She'd made her own bed and now she'd have to lie in it.

And so that was that. There'd be no support from that quarter then. All the avenues of escape from her predicament were one by one closing off, as far as Julie could see. Doors were slamming shut. There were few options left, it seemed. The weeks passed and she steadily ballooned. She hated the sight of her distended belly with its curiously engorged navel (why was that?), her swollen uncomfortable breasts with their dark organ-stop nipples, the increasing backache, the morning sickness that made her feel so wretched; and she dreaded the delivery. Please God; perhaps she might miscarry? That would be a solution. If she got through this she'd swear on the Holy Book never to allow another cock near her again, so help her. But then one morning, sitting on the edge of the bed getting dressed, she felt the first faint kick and somehow knew that wouldn't happen either; she would just have to face the trauma of it all.

Of course, before long she was called into the boss's office and handed her cards. Well; given the push anyway. She couldn't actually be formally fired because she hadn't been formally working. And Veronique, her landlady (again informal), who must have been knocking on for fifty but was still on The Game, became aware of her situation pretty smartish. Veronique (real name Mandy) was a kind-hearted soul though. She empathised. She'd been there more than once herself. When the tearful Julie poured out her heart, telling her confidante that she really didn't want the pregnancy, that her boyfriend had deserted her and her mother rejected her too, that she was terrified of motherhood, Veronique/Mandy was all sympathy. 'Yes Luv, I know, believe me,' she comforted, rubbing her knee as they sat in her kitchen drinking tea, 'Life can be an absolute bastard at times.'

She promised the despondent Julie that she'd see her through this. She knew what to do. And she had a friend who delivered babies. She'd be fine.

Christmas came and quickly went again. There was no trekking back to Ireland that year or even spending it with Maeve and boyfriend Tony. Maeve was as disapproving as Mammy and felt put out that she'd squandered good money on a secretarial course for her sister only for the silly little cow to get herself up the duff and have nothing to look forward to now except single parenthood. So it was spent in the ribald company of Veronique/Mandy and her workmates (they having been given three days off from work by Aimee (Andrea), who ran the massage parlour).

And then it was the end of January 1985, followed before she knew where she was by the last knockings of February. Veronique/Mandy became secretly concerned about the size of Julie. For someone about six and a half months gone now, if Julie was to be believed about the conception date it looked like it was going to be one enormous baby. Would her friend Madge be able to cope with the delivery when it came? Okay; Madge was a qualified midwife (albeit a struck-off-for-misconduct one) but even so . . . But then, if the worse came to the worse, there was always an emergency ambulance and A and E to fall back on. If it came to that, they'd just have to concoct some sort of story.

Things were taken out of Veronique's hands a fortnight later though. Late in from the parlour one evening (there having been a particularly demanding last minute customer who wanted Veronique's 'special,' but he was a regular so they couldn't say no), she was alerted to screams from Julie's room. She ran up the stairs, heart pounding, and rapped on her door before barging straight in. Julie was curled on her bed in a pool of amniotic fluid, red faced and gasping, looking terrified out of her wits.

'Oh Christ,' said Veronique, and ran back downstairs to the phone.

They were waiting, forewarned, incubators at the ready, for the ambulance to arrive. Wayne and Tom quickly carried the tiny bundles inside. Wayne's face was like thunder. He was normally composed and totally unflappable in an emergency, but this had really got to him. He was livid, unsurprisingly really. Jan had had their first only last Tuesday and he was still euphoric about it.

He addressed the team: Marjory Baxter, consultant paediatrician; Bev Rees, paediatric staff nurse; and other members of the night shift.

‘How the hell could anyone do this; how *could* they?’

Marjory was cool efficiency personified though. ‘Okay; calm down,’ she soothed, ‘tell us what you’ve got,’ as the babies were swiftly placed in the incubators and relieved of the blankets the ambulance men had swaddled them in. Wayne pulled himself together. ‘Found in a ladies loo, can you believe? Together in a bloody cardboard box, like unwanted kittens or something! Thankfully they were spotted almost straight away, we think. But not before whoever left them had scarpered. Looks as though they’re newborns. Not even cleaned up yet. Both got pulses and breathing, but the smaller one’s is a bit ragged. Poor little mites!’

The incubators were whisked into paediatric intensive care and Marjory got to work. She examined the smaller one first (although they were both tiny – certainly prems, by a good five weeks, probably). Heart reasonably okay although the beat quite rapid and a touch too shallow. Airways clear but breathing, as the angry ambulance man had said, a bit on the erratic side. Best on oxygen for a while. The larger one was better: heart and lungs really quite good, considering. Both seemed to have all their components, externally anyway. She’d check them more thoroughly later, when they were fully stabilised. She popped bigger baby on the scales. Four pounds two ounces (she still couldn’t think in terms of metric, to save her life). Not bad. Then she quickly weighed the smaller one. Three pounds ten. Um; could be better, although she’d seen a lot worse.

She looked at them both carefully as they lay, tidied up now with oversize woollen caps and wearing tiny nappies, safe now in their warm environments. They’d need some colostrum ideally, if there were any available. Apart from their size they looked remarkably similar. Monozygotics, possibly? That might explain the size disparity. Could have been a common placenta, but there was no way of knowing now. One might have been taking more than his share. Interesting. But anyway, it was academic. Unless tests showed up anything really untoward, they should both be okay.

And that was the inauspicious start the brothers had to life. They could so easily have expired even before they’d begun it, had they not been found quickly (when Veronique had peeped cautiously into the Ladies she’d found a cubicle occupied and so dropped the box with its blanket-nest of babies by the

wash basins and beaten a hasty retreat back to Madge's waiting car). And had they not been conveyed very quickly indeed by the surprised and appalled ambulance men to hospital. Of course the police were involved, but there were no clues at all as to the identity of the depositor of the tiny human package. The find made both the local and national news and the police went on television appealing for the mother to come forward, because apart from anything else she might need medical help, but they drew a complete blank. With no clue as to their identities, the babies needed names, if only temporary ones. Perhaps the birth mother might eventually come to light (but of course, even if she were discovered, she probably wouldn't have named them anyway as seemingly she didn't want them), but in the meantime they had to be called something.

The paediatric staff discussed it and Marjory suggested naming them for their ambulance men rescuers. Everyone agreed; they were the heroes of the piece. And so Wayne and Tom they became.

In good and caring hands now, they thrived, soon beginning to put on weight. Tom, the smaller sibling, came off oxygen support as his lungs and heart strengthened. And so they spent their first few days in a world into which they'd been thrust rather too soon. And one, sadly, without the welcoming, loving arms of parents. Although, as helpless tiny foundlings, they certainly did not go short of love from everyone in the paediatric unit. Soft-hearted Wayne senior and his colleague Tom became regular visitors on their time off, taking great interest in their namesakes' progress.

The little boys were quite unaware of their inauspicious start in life as they lay in their incubators with no other concerns than sleeping and suckling (although, sadly, not at a breast) and excreting. Never remember the surprise on occasional-midwife Madge's face when tiny Tom arrived first and it was suddenly apparent that there was another to come. (She'd assumed it was just one large, very active baby). Recall that they'd been shown to their exhausted young mother with the question, 'Do you want to keep them?,' and the tearful sideways shake of her perspiring head with its mop of greasy half blonde, half red hair as she turned her anguished face into the pillow and wept bitter, relieved, confused tears.

But they were well out of it, these two little mites with the first wisps of startlingly red hair. Their birth mother didn't keep her vow of celibacy for long, and she would not have coped well with them.

Instead they would be loved by other, surrogate parents who most certainly did want and love them. Oh yes: they would be loved.

