

Part One

Chapter One

Present Day — 2004

Life, my life, had been turned upside down, inside out.

For a second time.

Yesterday, I was just me: marking, planning, teaching, and bawling at kids who jacked around in class. It was all I had. All I needed. But today...

It had been an ordinary day, nothing special. I'd even forgotten I had an impending visitor until just before the tap on the door. But it was as if I knew, in that split second, deep down, that this was going to be different...that this forgotten visitor would hold something for me. You could say that I was apprehensive, prophetic and even a little bit manic...but I knew; about what, God only knows.

I think the trigger was the way that time slowed down as the door opened. The groaning of the hinges announced the arrival of a hand...a firm, grasping hand that choked the life out of the poor defenceless handle. The hand was connected to a toned, tanned arm. The arm, as arms tend to do, was attached to a broad shoulder, which pinned itself to a body.

My eyes scanned the rest, noting the long legs and the slender hips. I snapped myself out of my trance and became captured by ice blue eyes.

Have you ever felt your stomach drop into your shoes only to shoot back up into your mouth? That's what it felt like. It felt like I had been transported back thirteen years to a time when those blue eyes began to be the centre of my world. Fear gripped me...honestly. It gripped me right around the heart and squeezed the life out of it.

The room seemed to shrink; I seemed to expand. Not good.

That's all I remember.

In the blackness filling my head I could hear a concerned voice whispering my name, but it seemed too far away to be talking to me. The voice was familiar, too familiar. I wanted to shut it out, as I remembered what destruction it had caused. Slender, strong fingers gently patted the side of my face. I knew I had to open my eyes to see if it was all a dream.

Weakly, I forced my eyes to open, blinking away the startling light. Blurry images danced in front of me as anxious blue eyes became my centre of attention, the centre of my world once again.

After thirteen long years...out cold. Again. What a wuss.

Chapter Two

Thirteen years previously

'Fuck off, dyke!' I'd always had a way with words, hence the reason for my becoming an English teacher. *'Clam smacking arse licker!'* I should warn you now. I tend to swear when I'm distressed, nervous, happy, sad, melancholic, watching telly, drunk, sober...I could go on but I guess you get the picture.

I was sixteen years old and already had the mouth of a sailor. My vitriolic display was aimed at Justine Russell; she got on my tits. She always sucked up to teachers, but was a complete bitch to everyone else.

Finding out she had been caught with her pants down, literally, in the changing rooms with Ms 'Bulldyke' Wilkins had been a blessing. I vowed to put a 'special' in the school magazine (Post It to self: don't forget the hearts and flowers border).

I hated school. School was filled with two classes of people: popular and unpopular. Guess which class I fitted into. I had the dress sense of a kebab, the social skills of an amoeba, and the patience of a dog busting for a piss. I was definitely not in the prominent social circle, aka...the popular group. But then again, I felt I didn't deserve to be, and, more importantly, I didn't want to be.

My mouth had got me into too many scrapes and scraps. You see, I don't think things through before I speak my mind. Consequently, I had more black eyes and fat lips than Mike Tyson. This is the way of the Mancunian. Honestly. If I had been any other way, my family would have disowned me. In retrospect, it's a pity they didn't.

I think I was repressed. Oppressed? Suppressed? Depressed? One of them. Delete as applicable. You see, I wanted to be the one in the changing rooms with my...(ad lib to fade).

Well. Not with Bulldyke. She was...fuck...a bloke! With tits and a mullet. No. I went more for the dark haired beauties — classic features: straight nose, long black hair, tanned skin, lithe body, tall. In two words — Emma Jenkins. Now, she was hot...and she didn't even know I existed.

It seemed as if she'd appeared at the end of Year 10. Where she had been until then, God knows. Probably avoiding me, if she had any sense.

You know when time slows down and everything moves in slow motion, like in the films? That's how it was when I first spotted her.

I was rushing to Maths — does that makes sense, does anyone really rush to Maths? I digress. Anyway, I was walking to Maths rather quickly (that sounds better) and she was coming toward me with the Bitches of Eastwick, laughing, head back laughing. Cue director. Begin to slow things down from here.

My legs seemed to belong to a puppet master. They lifted up slowly and then placed themselves on the ground, noiselessly. I took in the whole scene. Her head was back and she was laughing, but I couldn't hear anything. Her mouth was open, displaying beautiful straight teeth encased by lips that had been formed from red velvet. Perfect. Her head came slowly forward, her closed eyes began to bud open, leisurely. Fluttering black eyelashes blinked open, like she was taking in the world at that moment, to reveal blue eyes...blue, blue eyes...

I was transfixed. Rooted to the spot. My breathing was erratic...my heart was pumping so hard it bruised the inside of my chest. Numbness engulfed me. My mouth was dry...like cardboard...and I thought I was going to keel over.

Long, dark hair fanned behind her as she flicked her raven locks over her shoulder. It appeared to stop...mid air (like in cheesy movies) and then fall behind her. A long sleek arm raised itself to finger stray locks into place. She had the poise and grace of a ballerina — strong, sure of herself. The complete opposite of me.

My eyes drifted down her frame, etching to memory every minute detail. Her skirt stopped a few inches from her knees. Tanned legs went on for miles and my eyes thoroughly enjoyed the ride, although my stomach decided it didn't like long journeys. Wimp.

Doc Martens!

I shook my head to clear it. But...Doc Martens! A complete revelation...a complete contrast to what I was expecting. Did ballerinas wear Doc Martens? Well they do now. I looked back to her face and was captured by blue eyes. Her expression was hard to read, but she looked kind of startled.

Then they were gone.

And summer arrived.

Six weeks of slob time. Perfect. And if hadn't been for spotting 'the Girl in the Docs', I would have loved every minute of it. The image of her in the corridor replayed in my mind like a BBC rerun. I guiltily embraced every shot of her — hands stroking her hair, the crooked smile, the parted, glistening lips. Every time I thought of the 'incident', it got a little more interesting.

The Bitches weren't there, obviously, just her and me. The school was empty...

No. I'm not going there. Not now. Not ever. I found that out the hard way.

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