

A decorative graphic featuring a starburst on the left, a single star on the right, and a cluster of dots and a heart shape on the right side, all surrounding the chapter title.

## Chapter One

Tabitha Brown's heart thudded in her chest as she read the Instagram caption on her phone. *Best night with my favourite girls!*

She didn't want to look, but she couldn't help but scrutinise every inch of the picture – Jess, her blonde, crinkled hair flowing down her shoulders, with her arms round two other girls, all three beaming into the lens. They looked like the *best* of friends.

*You really shouldn't be looking*, Tabby thought. *There's absolutely no reason to.*

But still she did.

She was sprawled out on the lawn in her gran's back garden, a book open by her side – *Solitaire* by Alice Oseman – and prescription sunglasses over her face.

Gran's garden wasn't huge, but she'd made the most of the space: there were pots teeming with flowers on the patio, beautiful clematises climbing up the side of the wall and dahlias spread open in bright, pink bloom; they'd only

just begun to flower. Tabby's favourites, though, were the almost-black cornflowers, a shock of vivid blue every few flower heads catching her eye. Gran had sent her a packet a few years ago, which she'd grown back home in Cheltenham. Then, they'd reminded her of Gran; now, they reminded her of home, so many miles away, being packed up. Soon, she'd have a new home here to think about.

She opened the comment box and took a deep breath in. *They weren't your favourite girls before*, she typed, but deleted it a second later.

'Tabby?' Gran's voice floated through the back door. 'Are you coming in for lunch?'

'Just a minute!' she called back, slipping her phone in her pocket and picking up her book.

Gran stood at the kitchen counter, cutting the crusts off a slice of bread. *She refuses to acknowledge I'm old enough to eat my crusts.*

'What were you doing out there, love? I thought the point of being outside was that you actually spent time doing something other than being glued to that mobile of yours.'

'Nothing really,' Tabby said. Her phone burned in her pocket.

'Well, don't spend too much time on it,' Gran said, wrapping her arm around Tabby's shoulders. 'I don't want you beating my high score on Candy Crush, do I?'

The surface of the kitchen table was covered with old TV magazines, bits of paper and empty medication boxes. Gran kept promising she'd tidy them up, but so far hadn't attempted it; one of these days, Tabby was going to take matters into her own hands. For now, though, she pushed everything to one side to make room and sat down.

'What have you got planned for the rest of the day?' Gran asked, joining her.

'Not much.' Tabby patted her book. 'Finishing this, I guess.'

*And stalking Jess's Instagram.*

'You could go out for a run. I see you brought your trainers with you. Why not pop out for a bit?'

'No, I really just want to get on with reading.' *I don't run. Not any more.*

'You didn't bring many books with you. I thought you'd have come with half your bookshelf in your suitcase!'

'What's with all the questions, Gran? There wasn't enough room to bring them all, and Dad made me clear loads out anyway. Apparently, I could have taken up an entire removal van with my bookshelf.'

'Well, you'll have to go to the library then. You brought your library card, didn't you?'

'I really am fine. Honestly.'

Tabby hated to get snappy, but she was content staying here, inside her blissful cocoon for ever, where the only irritation she had was Gran waking her up with One Direction blaring from her (old-school) CD player every morning. ('You do know they've been split up for years, right?' Tabby had asked, and received a sharp reply that yes, Gran did in fact know and it would be nice if Tabby never, ever mentioned 'Wayne' leaving because she was still highly emotional about it. Tabby hadn't bothered to correct her.)

Gran gave her a pointed look. 'It's either go to the library tomorrow or come to Zumba with me. Your choice! But if it's Zumba, I expect you to put the maximum amount of effort in. I saw you slacking last time. Rose and I could run rings around you and we have a combined age of a hundred and fifty-five.'

'All right, I'll go to the library. I'll leave you and Rose to OAP Zumba.'

Gran got up and placed her hands over Tabby's shoulders. 'If you change your mind, I've got some spare Lycra you can borrow. Hot pink, I think it is – perfect for your complexion!'

Tabby swatted her away, and their laughter mingled around them as Gran kicked her leg up in the air in an imitation of a Zumba move.

'You'll dislocate your new hips if you're not careful!'

‘I’m invincible,’ Gran replied. ‘Don’t you worry about me!’

Tabby felt the vibration of her phone inside her pocket.

Jess: So youve decided to run away early? Good luck with that

Jess: You may be able to leave but youll never get away from the fact that youre a complete loser

‘Got a secret admirer?’ Gran asked.

‘No.’ Tabby laughed it off. ‘It’s just one of those adverts asking me if I want a super summer saving on my phone bill.’

Palms sweating, Tabby put the phone back on the table; it clanked down harder than she’d intended. ‘What would you say to a cup of tea?’ *I’ve perfected the art of distraction.*

‘I’d say you were the best granddaughter in the whole world.’

*I don’t know about that.*