

Chapter One

As Nicky woke, she adjusted her eyes to the sunshine, which was making itself comfortable in her bedroom. She looked outside and noticed the world was starting to breathe. Summer was close and the days were starting earlier, as well as getting warmer. She loved the sun crawling into her bedroom in the mornings and embracing her with its warm rays. She turned over and looked at the letter which was now framed and on her bedside table. "*Live your sweet dreams*" it said. Nicky smiled. Still deeply in her thoughts, she heard the phone ring. She glanced at the clock and quickly answered – it just had to be important at this time of the day.

"Happy Anniversary, Nicky."

Nicky smiled when she heard her friend's familiar voice. "Good morning. I can't believe you remembered."

"Of course I did. Who would have ever thought?"

"Yes, it's strange how life sometimes works out."

"We're having dinner at my place tonight. Will you come as well?"

"I'll be there. And thanks for remembering," she said quietly and hung up.

Nicky took the letter and held it close. *It's been a year already*, she thought – and what a year it had been. She remembered each day so vividly like it had only been yesterday.

It was Monday morning, the start of another week, yet this one would open new doors for her and change her life in so many ways. It was time to wake her two girls, Aimee and Lilly. With her husband living overseas Nicky acknowledged, it had been, and still was, challenging raising the girls on her own, yet she loved every single minute. Her daughters were like their parents, different in every way, but Nicky adored them and was able to handle and understand their distinctive characters.

She went down the hallway to their bedrooms. Nicky smiled each time she went into the rooms which were both in pink. Aimee's taste, however, was slowly leaning towards a more teenager-like taste, with a few posters already pinned to the wall. Lilly still loved her dolls and all that came with it. Nicky gave them both an affectionate embrace. It was their daily routine in the morning. She also listened to their dreams while they were still fresh in their minds.

“And then the princess just ran away, Mum. I did want to help her, but she seemed so far away,” Lilly said. Nicky smiled. She had always considered dreams the basis of everyone's life and how one copes and deals with most of the daily situations. Nicky loved to listen to her daughters' stories, the weird ones, the impossible and funny ones, the loving ones and sometimes even the scary ones. It was a reminder of how she always wanted to share her dreams, but she had only been able to reveal them to her diary.

Nicky was in her early thirties and a doting mother of Aimee and Lilly. It was more her natural beauty that caught people's eye; the hazel brown eyes, slightly emphasised by a small amount of makeup and the blond hair nicely cut and styled. Nicky had an ever-present smile; affectionate and confident, but still shy and vulnerable.

When she had moved back to London from Los Angeles she chose to live in a smaller house in south London. The lounge room was downstairs and was furnished with a nice old

fashioned and cosy lounge, all decorated in warm colours. The old rocking chair, which she had found at the Brixton market, was her pride and joy. She had it refurbished and it went well with the rest of the room. The kitchen was adjacent to the lounge room. It was a very spacious kitchen that had big windows to the backyard. Even though Nicky wasn't a great cook, she felt the need for an open kitchen for her to feel comfortable and to have it as a "living" area as well. The rest of the downstairs area included two guests' rooms together with a small bathroom. Nicky and the girls' rooms were upstairs, as well as a little study.

Once the girls had gone to the bathroom to get ready, Nicky went downstairs to prepare breakfast. She had just finished setting the table when the girls joined her. Fortunately the girls were easy risers and were always eager to embrace a new day.

"Mum, I completely forgot, Mrs. Jackson is on PD today. I hope we'll have Mr. Brown instead. I like him. I reckon some of the girls are in love with him." Aimee giggled – and so did Nicky and Lilly. Nicky walked them to the main entrance of the school and gave them both a hug.

"Have a great day, girls. I love you!"

Every time she dropped off the girls, Nicky was impressed by the pure presence of the buildings, which she assumed dated back to the eighteenth century. She always imagined a long history for the school. It was situated on a big site, probably common land. There were four main buildings on the campus, each with a name that had importance in the history of the school. The garden was spectacular, as was the lawn. Entering the gate was like stepping back in time. It was picturesque and serene.

Nicky loved the appearance and aura of this school. The school she had attended in Germany was a sheer contrast. It had only been built in the 1970s, was grey, three stories, slab

construction, with no green around it whatsoever, except the sports oval.

Nicky drove on to Elephant & Castle Station, parked the car and caught the next train into the city to Charing Cross Road Station. It was only a short stroll from there to the Café in the Crypt in St-Martin-in-the-Fields, where she usually met Jamie each Monday. Both mums usually caught up on all the news and gossip or sometimes just watched the world go by. She couldn't believe that Jamie was already there waiting for her, even though they had dropped off the kids at the same time.

Mario had seen the ladies arrive and was busy preparing their usual order of a cup of Earl Grey tea for Nicky and a cappuccino for Jamie, with some cheesecake as well.

“So when are you heading off to Dublin?” Jamie asked.

“I'm leaving Friday lunch time. I'll pick up the ticket later on.”

“And you're really sure it's a good idea to meet fans?”

“Yes, I'm really sure. You've asked me that about ten times now. It'll be okay. And if not, I will just pack my bags and come home – with a bit more wisdom under my belt.”

“I should stop worrying, shouldn't I?”

“Or just join me.”

“You know I would have loved to, but not with Chris's seminar only finishing late Friday afternoon. By the way, do you need me to pick up the girls on Friday?”

“Actually, no. Robert will pick them up, so you don't have to worry about that.”

“You're so really lucky to have such a great father-in-law. I'm sure it makes life so much easier with Shane living in Los Angeles. How is he, by the way?”

“On set for another movie. Apparently this one will be the big break for him.”

“He'll get there. I mean, he's got a few movies under his belt already, hasn't he?” Jamie had a sip of her cappuccino. “I still can't understand how you can prefer living in rainy London

to sunny Los Angeles. Hello, what's wrong with you?"

They both laughed, even though they both knew it hadn't been easy for Nicky when she had moved to the States for a short time.

"Sunshine doesn't help if you're lonely and don't get opportunities. Besides I like London. This is where I've spent most of my life, where I feel secure and happy. Not to mention that this is Aimee and Lilly's home. They're English. Full stop. And as you know, it has quite a few advantages living close to my in-laws." Nicky smiled and Jamie knew what she was referring to.

"Well, you know I'm glad that you're back here. Not to forget my two girls. Geez, I can't believe how much they were fretting for Aimee and Lilly."

Nicky loved her morning tea with Jamie and would have loved it so much if Jamie had joined her on her trip to Dublin. But it was something she had to do on her own.