

Chapter Seventeen

Offers

When we finally got home, I have to admit, I was dog-tired. I put it down to the anxiety of going on the telly for the first time – and the last, if I had my way. There was still a crowd outside our house: it wasn't as big as the day before, but it was big enough. My heart sank at the prospect of us having to fight our way through yet more people. Luckily there were also two policemen I hadn't seen before near our house. They made a bee-line for us.

'Am I glad to see you! How come you're still here?' asked Dad.

'Sergeant Dexter thought a couple of us had better stay here to make sure the crowd behaves,' said one of the policemen.

We were escorted through the crowd into our house. On the way a woman shouted out to me, 'Can I shake your hand, Cameron?'

I was so surprised that a perfect stranger should want to shake my grubby hand that I actually put it out. Only then did I realize I was still holding the two envelopes I'd been

given at the TV studio. I'd forgotten all about them. I switched them to my other hand.

The woman beamed at me. 'Good luck!'

I smiled back, unsure of what to say. We entered our house. The police stayed outside.

'Cathy, would you like a cup of peppermint tea?' Dad asked.

'Yes, please.' Mum sighed gratefully. 'What a day!'

'I'll massage your feet as well if you like,' said Dad.

Rather him than me! 'What about my feet?' I asked.

'Your cheesy feet! You must be joking. You've got two hands, haven't you?' said Dad. 'Get on with it!'

So that was that! Not that I'd expected anything else. I tore open the first envelope, wondering what was so important. I started to read, and the more I read the more amazed I became. I literally couldn't believe my eyes. I read it again, thinking that maybe someone was playing a joke on us.

'Cam, what's the matter?' asked Mum.

Stunned, I looked up at her. I handed her the letter without a word. Mum's expression mirrored my own as she started to read.

'My eyes aren't playing tricks on me, are they?' I whispered.

'What's going on?' Dad asked.

'This newspaper is offering us thousands of pounds for our story.' Mum handed Dad the letter. 'They want our exclusive story and unlimited access to Cameron for the next year.'

As Dad read the letter, I tore open the second letter that had been thrust into my hands.

'Yes!' I squealed with delight. 'We're rich! This newspaper is offering even more money than the first one.'

Mum snatched the letter out of my hand. I started dancing around the hall. 'We're rich! We're rich! I can get a mountain bike with twenty-four gears! I could get a *car* if I wanted to.'

A slow, burning frown crept over Mum's face. Dad stared at me.

'What's the matter?' I asked.

Anyone would think the roof had just blown off rather than not one but two offers of tons of money in the very same day. Mum and Dad looked at each other. Without saying a word, they both proceeded to tear each offer into shreds.

'What're you doing? Are you mad?' I stared at the bits of paper Mum was piling into Dad's cupped hands. I followed Dad as he walked into the living room and dumped the whole lot into the wastepaper bin. I fell to my knees and scrambled in the bin to fish the pieces out again.

‘Cameron, get up. Now.’ Dad used a tone of voice that I’d never heard before. It stopped me cold. I looked up at him. His eyes were sparking with anger. Anger directed solely at me. ‘Get off your knees.’

I stood up, although I could hardly drag my eyes away from the bin. ‘But, Dad, that’s a lot of money.’

‘I don’t care if they offer ten times as much, my answer would still be the same. I’m not letting the papers or the telly or anyone else into our lives like that.’

‘But . . . but . . . I don’t understand.’

‘Cameron, your dad and I want this family to get back to normal as soon as possible,’ said Mum. ‘We want our lives to get back to the way they were – private and ours. We can hardly say we want our privacy if we let a tabloid plaster our faces and our whole lives over its front page, now can we?’

‘But what about all that money?’ I couldn’t believe that Mum and Dad would pass up on opportunity like this. ‘They’re going to pay us a fortune.’

‘Not if we say no, they’re not,’ said Mum.

‘But you can’t say no. You just can’t. We could have a new house and a new car and anything we want.’

‘We have a roof over our heads, bread on the table and each other. What more do we want?’ Dad smiled.

‘I’m being serious.’ I was practically shouting by now. I couldn’t help it. All that money had danced in front of me and now, because of Mum and Dad, it was dancing away out of reach. ‘If we don’t take the money, they’ll just give it to the next transplant patient Dr Bryce talked about. That’s our money.’

Dad’s smile disappeared. ‘That is not our money, Cameron. The press aren’t getting our story ’cos we have nothing to tell them.’

‘They want my story, not yours. You don’t have a story.’ Fury sat like a boulder on my chest. ‘By rights that’s my money, not yours. You’ve got no right to say no. I want—’

‘Cameron, that’s enough.’ Mum frowned. ‘We said no, and that’s final.’

‘I hate you. I hate both of you,’ I shouted.

And I ran up the stairs to my bedroom as fast as I could. I didn’t stop until I threw myself on the bed, every part of my body clenched and angry. I waited to hear footsteps climbing the stairs. At any moment now Mum and Dad would come into my room and tell me that if I really wanted to give my story to the papers, they’d let me do it. Any second now . . .

But there were no footsteps. My bedroom door didn’t open. I sat up on my bed and watched the door. Dr Bryce had given

me a new lease of life and, just like that, Mum and Dad were determined to ruin it. Images of money swirled around me. Notes, up to the ceiling. Five- and ten- and twenty- and fifty-pound notes spread out as far as the eye could see, and it could've all been mine.

How could they? I would never, ever forgive them. Not if I lived to be 150.

'Cameron, come on downstairs for your dinner.' Mum popped her head around my door.

'I'm not hungry.' I didn't look up from my book.

I'd been in my bedroom for over two hours now and I had no intention of coming out for the rest of the night. I sensed rather than saw Mum come over and sit on the bottom of my bed.

'Did you speak to Alex today?' Mum asked me unexpectedly.

'No.' I looked at her. 'Why?'

'I think you should,' said Mum. 'I think you should tell Alex exactly what's going on.'

'I don't need to any more.' I frowned. 'I'm going to be around for a good while yet.'

'I know. But you can still tell Alex all about the months before he or she is born.'

'I thought that but then I thought maybe it was tempting fate,' I said doubtfully.

'A lot of things are going to happen to all of us in the next few months. Some good. Some bad. You'll never have another opportunity like this to let Alex know what's going on in our lives. I think you'll kick yourself if you miss this chance.'

'I . . . I'll think about it,' I replied.

Mum smiled. 'Fine.' She stood up and walked to the door. 'I'll keep your dinner in the oven for you, just in case you change your mind.'

'I won't.'

'We'll see,' was all she said.

'Mum, I'm sorry I said I hated you and Dad,' I mumbled. 'I didn't mean it.'

'I know. But that's why you have to be careful about money.'

'Money being the root of all evil,' I supplied dismissively. The last thing I wanted from Mum was a morality lecture.

'Money can do a lot of good things. Money isn't the root of all evil. *Love* of money is the root of all evil,' Mum amended. 'You think about what happened when we told you we were going to turn down those offers made by the newspapers. You turned into someone else – someone I could barely

recognize. You'll have to watch that, Cameron. Hold on to the things that mattered before your operation.'

I frowned at Mum. I hadn't a clue what she was talking about.

'Cameron, you're a very special boy. Your dad and I love you very much – we always have and we always will. But now lots of people are going to say you're only special because of your operation. They'll want to throw money at you and goodness only knows what else. But don't let them, or you'll start to believe that the only thing about you that's worth anything is your new heart. And then the true you will get lost. D'you understand?'

I shook my head.

'Never mind. Maybe one day you will. See you downstairs,' Mum said. And she shut the door behind her.

I felt really strange once Mum had left. I stood up and walked over to my dressing table. Staring at myself in the mirror, I replayed in my head everything that had happened downstairs. Everything I'd said, everything I'd done. I thought over what Mum had just said, grasping to understand what she'd tried to tell me. But the more I thought about it, the more confused I felt. I took the camcorder bag out from under my bed.

Hi, Alex,

It's me again. We've just come back from a press conference. My first and last, I hope. Dr Bryce didn't put a foot wrong. I didn't put a foot right. Dr Bryce talked about me as if I was just a piece of machinery on an assembly line.

The first of many. Bring them on. Next!

That's how I felt when he was talking. But then, what did I expect? I don't know. Maybe I expected him to refer to me more. Maybe I expected him to refer to me less. Maybe I wanted to be special, unique. I don't know. All I know is, it was hot and bright under the lights and after a while I began to feel very sick. I was glad to get out of there. On the way out, two journalists stuffed envelopes into my hand. And guess what? Two newspapers offered me thousands and thousands for my story.

Me! Can you imagine?

But Mum and Dad said no and put the letters in the bin. I hit the roof. I mean, I went absolutely ballistic. All I could see was the money I was losing. It was as if they were stealing it out of my pocket – which of course they weren't. I can't believe how I blew up at them. I mean, I still don't see why we can't just take the money, give the papers a couple of interviews and laugh all the way to the bank, but I

shouldn't have lost my temper like that. I don't know what came over me.

Yes, I do.

I think I became blinded by the pound signs in my eyes. It was a lot of money. Ah well! At least one day I'll be able to look back and say I was offered a fortune for my life story. Me! There's not many people who can say that!

I think I'll shut up now. I'm hungry. I'm going to go down for my dinner.

Talk to you soon!

'Mum, where's my dinner?'

Mum and Dad exchanged a smile.

'In the oven. Hungry now?'

'Starving.'

'Are you going to eat it with us?' asked Dad.

I frowned. 'Where else would I eat it?'

'Just wondered,' Dad said in a fake off-hand manner.

'Sorry about earlier,' I mumbled, and sat down.

'Your dinner's in the oven,' Mum repeated pointedly.

'Oh! And I'm big enough and ugly enough to get it myself, eh?' I stood up again.

Mum and Dad laughed. 'You said that,' said Dad. 'We didn't!'

Chapter Eighteen

School

It was early Monday morning and we still had a crowd outside our house – although it seemed that Mum was right: the crowd was dwindling. Mind you, they still weren't disappearing fast enough for my liking.

'Am I going to have to walk through that lot to get to school?' I said, frowning out of the front-room window.

'No. Until this whole thing blows over, your dad or I will take you to school,' said Mum.

'But Dad's gone to work.'

'So I'll drive you today.'

'You'll drive me?'

'Yes. I can drive, you know. I have passed my test.'

'But that was when you had to crank up the engine from the front of the car to start it!' I scoffed. 'And you hate driving!'

'Well, I'll just have to learn to love it, won't I? The police have recommended that that's what we do until all those people outside our house get a life.' Mum sighed.

'But why go to all this bother?'

Mum looked away from me. She couldn't meet my eyes and, in that instant, I knew that something was very wrong.

'Mum . . . ?'

'Come on, we'd better get going. You don't want to be late on your first day back at school.'

I watched Mum but I didn't say anything. This was totally unlike her. Mum believed in straight talk and no nonsense. Say what you mean and mean what you say, that was her motto. She was the last one to hide anything from me but that's what was happening.

'Won't some of these journalists and rubber-neckers be at school too?' I asked.

'They have to stay outside the school grounds or they'll be arrested. Journalists have to get school and local authority permission before they can go onto the school premises,' Mum told me. 'In fact, you'll probably get more privacy at school than in this house.'

Silence.

'Are you all right, Mum?'

'I'm fine.'

'What about Alex?'

Mum patted her pregnant bulge. 'Alex is fine too. You've given yourself your anti-rejection injection?'

'Yes, Mum. And I've taken my tablets and my medicine.' Mum asked me that question every morning without fail.

'Then we'd better go. Are you ready, Cam?'

I nodded. Something was going on. The question was what? I didn't ask and Mum wasn't going to say but I was determined to find out.

'Cameron, how are you?'

'How are you feeling?'

'We saw you on the telly!'

From the moment I walked into school I was surrounded by my friends and others who'd never had one word to say to me before. Although it was embarrassing, in a strange way it was also quite nice! I was the centre of attention. I was *special*. A couple of kids even asked me for my autograph. It was bizarre!

'I saw you on telly, weed!' Travis pushed his way through the crowd to stand in front of me. 'I was surprised you had the guts.'

'My name is Cameron, not weed,' I told him. 'And I've got guts and a lot more besides. Now, could you shift, you're in my way.'

Travis looked around. 'Well, you're braver than me.' I stared at him. That was the very last thing I'd expected him

to say. 'I don't know if I could've done what you did,' he continued.

'You couldn't, muscle-head!' I told him without hesitation. 'Excuse me.' I swept past him in the best royal fashion. The monarchy would've been proud of me! If Travis thought we could be friends now, he had another thought coming. Not after all the grief he'd given me over the last year!

I didn't so much walk as allow myself to be swept along to class by the crowd of people around me. And then I saw him – Marlon. I stopped and we both just looked at each other. I didn't know what to say or do – so I said and did nothing. I walked past him without a word. Even as I was doing it, I wanted to stop and go back and say sorry and laugh and have everything just as it'd been before. But then I was angry with myself. Why should I apologize? He was the one who should say sorry, not me! And I had the image of the front page of the *Daily Press* in my head to prove it. So why was I so upset?

By the time Mr Stewart arrived I had so many people around me, I couldn't move.

'Anyone who's not in my class can leave – NOW!' Mr Stewart bellowed out.

To be honest, I was glad to see him. All those people

surrounding me and asking question after question made me feel as if I was being pecked to bits. Without ceremony, Mr Stewart ushered out all those who shouldn't have been in his class.

The noise was deafening – chatter and laughter and a couple of prods in the back from Andrew, who sat behind me. I grinned at him and looked around, glad to be back. There was Julie. She caught me watching her and immediately looked away. Now that I was like everyone else, maybe Julie and I . . . My face burning, I carried on looking around. I didn't want anyone else to look at me and guess what I was thinking. Marlon stood over by the window, watching me. I hadn't see him standing there when I'd been surrounded. He waited until the rest of us had sat down at our desks before coming over to sit next to me.

'Cameron, can I talk to you?' he whispered.

I looked directly at him. 'What about?'

'I . . . I'm sorry about the newspaper article . . .'

'Is that all you've got to say? You're sorry?'

Neither of us spoke above a fervent whisper. Mr Stewart was still chucking kids out of his class, but I didn't want to attract his attention – or anyone else's, for that matter.

'What d'you want me to say?' Marlon asked.

'You promised me you wouldn't tell anyone about my operation. Now we can't get out of the house for the crowds. We can't use our phone 'cos we've got people calling us day and night. We can't even pick our noses in peace without our every movement being recorded and analysed. We have to keep all the upstairs curtains drawn to stop reporters trying to spy in from our neighbours' houses. And we have you to thank for all of that.'

'You don't understand. I was upset about . . . about what might happen to you. Mum kept pestering me until I told her why I was moping around the house. I made her promise not to tell anyone, but she told Dad and he was the one who told the newspapers.'

'I hear your family made a lot of money from selling me out.' I was scornful.

'It wasn't me,' Marlon protested. 'Dad did it, not me.'

'Excuse me, but I told you and only you. And I told you to keep it a secret. Don't blame your dad because he can't keep his mouth shut either. If you'd kept your promise, your dad would never have had a story to tell – or sell.'

'I'm sorry. I'm sorry. *I'm sorry!* What more can I say? It won't happen again – I promise.'

'Too right it won't happen again.' My eyes narrowed as I

regarded Marlon. 'You must be nuts if you think I'd ever trust you with another secret.'

'You *can* trust me. I won't let you down again . . .'

'Read my lips. You won't get the chance. D'you get it? D'you dig it? D'you *grab*?!'

'Er . . . that's enough talking, thank you,' Mr Stewart hollered. 'What is the matter with everyone today? It's just your ordinary, everyday, standard Monday morning, so let's get on with it.' He looked at me.

Please don't ask me to say a few words, I prayed. Please don't.

'Welcome back, Cameron.' Mr Stewart smiled. 'Now then, while I take the register you can all get out your maths books. Double maths first thing on a Monday morning. I love it!'

I smiled my thanks at Mr Stewart. Thank goodness he hadn't asked me to show myself up.

'Here, Cam.' Andrew prodded me in the back again. 'We're going swimming tomorrow afternoon after school. D'you want to come?'

'Yeah, all right. Er . . . I'll have to check and make sure it's OK first,' I amended.

Now that I was well, I wouldn't have to bend the truth any more about where I was going each Tuesday evening. I'd ask

Mum and Dad if it was OK for me to go swimming. I was sure they'd say yes. Dr Bryce had said I could do anything I wanted, I just shouldn't overdo it. My body needed time to build in strength and stamina after two years of no exercise because my old heart couldn't take it. But now I had a new heart in me. That thought never ceased to amaze me. I took my pulse. It was strong and regular just the way it should be.

'Are you OK?' Marlon asked immediately.

I frowned. 'Yes. Why wouldn't I be?'

'You're taking your pulse.'

'So? I'm fine. Or are you looking for more info to sell to the papers?'

The moment the words were out I was sorry. I opened my mouth to say so but Marlon had turned away and the moment was lost. I didn't know what was wrong with me. I seemed to be lashing out – there was no other way to describe it – and I had no idea why. First Mum and Dad, then Travis, now Marlon.

'If I was the one who'd had a heart transplant operation and you were the one who'd told, I would've forgiven you,' Marlon said quietly.

I looked at him. He looked straight ahead at the teacher.

'I have forgiven you,' I said.

'No, you haven't,' Marlon replied.

'Yes, I have.'

Marlon looked at me. He just looked. And in that moment, I knew and he knew that I was lying. He was right. In spite of all the things I told myself about forgiving but not forgetting, I knew that I hadn't forgiven Marlon. Deep inside, I was still angry. Deep inside, I was still hurt.

For the rest of the double lesson Marlon and I listened to Mr Stewart drone on and did the exercises we were meant to in our maths books. But we didn't say a word to each other. That was something that had never happened before. And I didn't like it.

Chapter Nineteen

The Right Moment

When the double lesson was over, I made a bee-line for Julie's desk. I wanted to get to her before she left the classroom. If she was surrounded by all her friends, I'd never pluck up the courage to do this. As she looked up, I gave her what I hoped was my best smile. She got the teeth and all! Julie looked away, her expression serious. I wondered if she knew what was coming. Or had I done something to upset her? No, I couldn't have. I'd only just got back to school, for goodness' sake.

Get a grip, Cam! I told myself sternly.

It was now or never. I took a deep breath and forced myself to speak before I could chicken out. 'Hi, Julie.'

'Oh, hi, Cameron . . .' There was a distinctly frosty look on Julie's face. And it wasn't getting better, it was getting worse.

'How are you?' I asked to fill the uncomfortable silence descending between us.

Julie started reading the book in front of her. I might've thought she didn't want to speak to me if it hadn't been for the fact that the book was upside down and it took Julie

several seconds to realize it.

I smiled. 'You might find this easier.' And I picked up her book and turned it round for her. When I handed it back to her, she drew away as if I was about to slap her. My smile faded. 'What's the matter?' I asked.

'Nothing.'

'Here you are.' I tried to give back her book. She drew away even further. 'Is something wrong?' I asked.

'Just leave it on my desk.' Julie tried for a smile, but it came nowhere near her eyes.

Puzzled, I regarded her. I had no idea what I'd done, but I'd obviously done something. Was she upset because I hadn't told her all about my operation? I hadn't told anyone all the facts, except Marlon. I couldn't believe she wasn't talking to me because of that.

'What're you reading anyway?' This wasn't going as well as I'd hoped I was looking for the right moment to invite Julie to the pictures, but the right moment was rapidly disappearing over the horizon. I looked at the cover of the book Julie had been reading. It was a book called *Computer Ghost* by some woman I'd never heard of before. The cover was good though. A whirling, swirling mist surrounding a computer screen.

'Can I borrow it after you?' I asked.

'You can take it now if you like,' Julie said quickly.

'But you haven't finished it . . .'

'Yes, I have. I've already read it. I was just reading it again. Go on, take it.'

And as I looked at Julie, it slowly dawned on me what was going on. She was *scared* of me. I couldn't believe it and yet . . . and yet I was sure I was right.

'I don't bite, you know.' I tried to say it as a joke, but I couldn't keep the edge out of my voice. I thrust the book back at Julie.

She took a deep breath. 'Look, Cam, I'm not being funny but Mum said you could have all kinds of germs and diseases in you now. Germs and diseases that are new to humans and dangerous. Mum said I wasn't to go anywhere near you.'

It was as if Julie had kicked me in the stomach. I was only vaguely aware of the stillness rippling through the classroom. I stared at Julie. She frowned at me.

'I don't want to be mean, but you wouldn't take the hint,' she whispered.

'Julie, it's still me – inside and out. I haven't changed.'

'You've got a pig's heart inside you. Of course you've changed,' Julie said, her voice fearful – and angry because of

it.

'I haven't got any germs or diseases,' I protested. My mouth felt as if it was filled with ashes and they were choking me.

'You don't know that. Not for sure. My mum said . . .'

'I don't give a stuff what your mum said. What do you say?' I asked.

'Cameron, can we just leave it?' Julie looked around the classroom, embarrassed. I didn't take my eyes off her.

'What do *you* say?' I asked again.

It was like having a sore tooth that you keep prodding with your tongue even though it hurts, or a scab you keep picking. I knew I should walk away. I knew I should just leave, but I had to hear her say it.

'I think Mum's right. You've got a pig's heart inside you, so how d'you know what's going on in your body now?'

Slowly, I put the book back down on Julie's desk. I looked around the classroom. Some people couldn't meet my eyes and they looked away. Others looked straight back at me. I realized that Julie wasn't alone. Some of the others didn't like the idea of being near me either. I'd been so blinded by all the people surrounding me earlier that I hadn't noticed the ones who kept well away.

I looked down at the ground. I couldn't bear to catch anyone else's eye. Turning, I left the classroom, quietly shutting the door behind me.

Chapter Twenty

Nan

'How was school today?' Mum asked.

School was over and we were driving back home. I sighed and looked out of the windscreen. 'Complicated,' I replied at last.

'Ah!' Mum didn't say anything else and she didn't ask why.

To be honest, for once I wouldn't have minded if she had asked me to explain. On the way home I tried a couple of times to tell her what Julie had said. More than once I tried to tell her about me and Marlon, but the right moment and the right words never really presented themselves.

When we got home, there was a crowd of only about twenty people. A definite improvement.

At the expression on my face, Mum said, 'Yes, I know! By the end of the week let's hope they'll all be gone.'

With a policewoman's help we managed to reach our house without too much pushing and shoving. At least on this front, things were getting better. I walked into the living room, where I got a wonderful surprise.

'Nan!'

‘Cameron, you goose! How are you?’

Nan threw down the magazine she was reading, sprang off the sofa and gave me a big hug. I was so pleased to see her that I let her!

‘So what’s all this about you having a pig’s innards in your chest?’ Nan thumped the back of her hand against my chest. ‘And why do I have to buy the *Daily Press* to find out what’s going on with my own grandson?’

‘We told you Cam was going to have a heart transplant,’ Mum tried.

‘You didn’t say where the heart was coming from though, did you?’

Mum sighed. ‘I’ve been getting grief for that all day.’

I made the big mistake of trying to explain. ‘Nan, we couldn’t tell anyone. Dr Bryce told us not to.’

‘And just when did I become – anyone! I’m your nan – not *anyone*.’

‘Mother, don’t start again. *Please*,’ Mum pleaded. ‘And we did phone you as soon as the story hit the newspapers.’

‘Hhumph!’ Nan sniffed. ‘It was a little late by then, don’t you think?’ When Mum looked suitably contrite, Nan softened a little. A very little. ‘Anyway, I saw all of you on the telly and I saw the crowds outside your house. You obviously

need me here.’

‘With you here, we don’t need the police,’ I murmured.

Nan smiled. ‘Thank you, Cameron – I think!’

I’d forgotten she had ears like a bat! And eyes like a spy satellite. Not much got past my nan. She was looking more tired than the last time I’d seen her though. I looked at her, really looked at her, and for the first time she appeared . . . old. She seemed smaller, more fragile. Her shoulders dropped and even when she smiled it was as if a sigh wasn’t too far away.

Mum moved over to the sofa and picked up Nan’s magazine. I saw her shake her head. She held it up behind Nan’s back for me to see. It was a magazine about coffins!

‘Nan, why’re you reading that?’ I asked, pointing to it with distaste.

Nan turned to see what I was talking about. ‘Cam, I’m no spring chicken any more and I have to think about these things. I’m going to be in my coffin a long time, so I want to make sure I pick out one that’s comfortable.’

Mum shook her head even more at that. I know I should’ve been used to Nan by now but I still thought the idea was really morbid.

‘Right! Well, I’ll leave you two to it. I’m off to do some food

shopping,' said Mum, leaving the room. 'I think we'll see about getting our phone number changed as well, seeing as how our number has been leaked to the press.'

Nan took my arm and we went over to the window. 'Your fan club?' she said drily. 'You should attach a garden hose to the cold tap in the bathroom and let them all have it!'

'OK, Mum. Drive safely. 'Bye, Mum!' From the hall, Mum called out all the things I suppose I should've said to her.

'Bye, Mum,' I called back.

'Huh!' Mum guffawed.

She retrieved her car keys from the hall table and I heard our front door open and close. Nan sat down on the sofa, then patted the space next to her. I sat down eagerly.

'So, how're you doing?' she asked without preamble.

'Fine, I guess,' I answered lightly.

Nan gave me a look. 'This is your nan you're talking to, not your mum and dad. I'll ask you again, how're you doing?'

I sighed and slumped right back on the sofa. 'I suppose I'm all right. I've never been healthier. I've never felt so fit . . .'

'But?'

'But suddenly everything seems so complicated,' I admitted.

'In what way?'

'Did Mum tell you we were offered a lot of money for our story?'

'Yes.'

'What do you think of that?'

'I think your mum and dad should take the money and run. If the papers are stupid enough to offer that kind of money then I would grab it with both hands. But I appreciate your mum's reasons.'

'They were offering a whole lot of money.' I couldn't keep the wistful note out of my voice.

'That's 'cos they have more money than sense,' Nan said scathingly.

We sat in silence for a while, but it wasn't an uneasy silence. Nan knew there was more coming. She was just letting me tell it in my own time.

'Dr Bryce made us promise not to tell anyone about the operation,' I began at last. 'Not even you, although Mum and Dad wanted to. The only thing we could tell anyone was that I was having a heart transplant. We couldn't say where the heart was coming from. But . . . but I told my best friend, Marlon. He promised me he wouldn't tell anyone else, but . . .'

'But that's how it got into the papers?'

I nodded. 'Marlon says his dad told the papers, but then Marlon shouldn't have blabbed it to his mum and dad in the first place.'

'You mean, the way you shouldn't have blabbed it to Marlon in the first place?' Nan asked.

'That's different,' I said at once.

'How so?'

'It was my secret to tell,' I said, annoyed. 'It wasn't Marlon's.'

'True.'

'There! I knew you'd understand,' I said, relieved.

'Understand what?'

'Today was the first time I've seen Marlon since my operation and . . . well, we argued this morning and we've barely said five sentences to each other since.'

'Who's not talking to whom?'

'I guess I'm not talking to him,' I admitted.

'Why?'

'I just told you why.' I frowned. I could feel Nan's sympathy for my point of view evaporating.

'Because he made a mistake?' Nan raised her eyebrows.

'It was a bit more than that,' I protested.

Nan sighed. 'Cameron, in this life you'll find that when you

get right down to it, things are rarely as complicated as they seem. It seems to me quite simple really. Your friend made a mistake – something we all do, including you. You now have to decide if you're going to spend the rest of your life bearing a grudge or not. And believe me, life is too short for that kind of nonsense. Even at my advanced years, life is too short.'

I stared at Nan. Was that really what I was doing? 'I don't bear grudges.'

'Glad to hear it,' said Nan. 'Don't start either. So did anything else happen today?'

I looked at Nan and shook my head. Now that the moment had arrived, I didn't want to tell her about Julie. I didn't want to tell anyone. Just thinking about it did funny things to my insides. After my operation I thought I'd be just like everyone else. That was my whole reason for doing it. Only I hadn't realized that some people like Julie and her mum might think otherwise.

I thought about the times before my operation when every time I'd looked up from my desk Julie was there smiling at me. I think Marlon was right. Julie had liked me before my operation. Now all that had changed. It was strange the way things worked out.

'Come on, Cam. Don't get too comfy – we have dinner to

make.' Nan leapt to her feet.

I followed more slowly. I had a lot to think about. 'Nan,' I said as she headed out of the door.

'Yes, dear?'

'I'm glad you're here.'

'Of course you are!' Nan smiled. 'And it seems to me I arrived only just in time!'

When we got to the kitchen, Nan started by investigating the fridge. 'I think some of my fried chicken, some baked potatoes and veggies ought to do the trick.'

'Your fried chicken?' I asked suspiciously. 'Does that involve just taking some chicken out of a packet and putting it in the oven or is there chopping and slicing and dicing involved?'

'Taking some chicken out of a packet?' Nan was scandalized. 'I don't think so!'

'Can I watch?' I asked, hoping Nan wouldn't spot what I was trying to do.

'No, you can help!' she replied at once. 'You may be smart, child, but I'm smarter!'

Worth a try!

'The first thing you can do though,' said Nan, 'is change the light bulb in the spare bedroom for me. I want to see where

I'm going when I go to bed tonight, before I end up sleeping on the window sill!'

'OK, Nan,' I said, glad to get out of the cooking. Now all I had to do was drag out changing the light bulb for an hour or so, until the worst was over.

'I want you back down here in five minutes – maximum,' said Nan. 'Or I'll come upstairs to fetch you – and you don't want that.'

'Are you reading my mind or something?' I asked, impressed.

Nan laughed. 'Now if I told you that, you'd know as much as I do!'

I went over to the light-bulb drawer. When I opened it, it was like opening a jack-in-the-box. Letters and more letters sprang out of it, falling to the floor. Huffing impatiently I squatted down to pick them up.

'Let me do that,' Nan said quickly.

'It's OK, I've got them.' I waved her off.

'No, Cameron, you go and change the light bulb.'

I frowned up at Nan. She was nervous, agitated. What was her problem? Did she think my new heart might collapse with the strain of squatting down? I smiled to reassure her. 'Nan, I'm here now. It'll only take me two seconds. And Dr

Bryce didn't say anything about not bending down!

As I reached out for a handful of the papers, I caught sight of my name on one of the letters. So I picked it up and read it.

And I wish I hadn't.

L. E. P. A.R.

LEAGUE FOR THE PROTECTION OF ANIMAL RIGHTS

Mr and Mrs Kelsey,

We at LEPAR find you totally immoral and despicable. How could you condone the suffering of innocent animals – because that's what you've done by allowing your son Cameron to have the heart of a pig transplanted into his body. Pigs are intelligent animals with thoughts and feelings just like yourselves. Would you feel it right to have humans bred for the sole purpose of being killed to allow others to use their organs? If it is not right for humans, why do you feel that such action is right and correct for animals?

We understand your concern for your son. Heart disease is a terrible affliction but it is your attempted solution that we find so reprehensible . . .

I didn't read any more. I couldn't. I picked up another of the letters. It was even worse, rage and anger spilling from every

word on the page. I picked up another and another. Threats and more threats made against me, against Mum and Dad, against our house, our car. It was horrible. Some of the letters accused Mum and Dad of only letting me have the operation so they could cash in on the resulting publicity. Some were from animal lovers who sympathized with Mum and Dad's position but asked if they had explored all the options. Some were actually from people wishing us well but they were few and far between. Most were just nasty.

Profoundly shocked, I looked up at Nan. 'Have you seen these?' I asked.

'Some of them,' Nan admitted. 'They're today's batch of letters. I read some of them when I arrived this morning. I didn't know your mum had put them in there. I wish she'd told me.'

'Today's batch?' I stared. 'You mean we get these every day?'

'Every single day.'

'But why do Mum and Dad keep them?' I looked down at the pile of letters again. It couldn't have been more loathsome if it'd been a pile of horse manure on the kitchen floor.

'The police advised them to keep the worst ones – just in

case someone tries something. So each night, after you're in bed, they go through them.'

I picked up another.

'No, Cameron. Put it down. Don't read any more,' Nan ordered gently.

'These people hate me. They don't even know me and they hate me. What've I ever done to *them*?' I said, bewildered.

'Cameron, it's not you. It's what you represent. You mustn't take it personally.'

But how could I take it any other way? These people really hated me and Mum and Dad for what we'd done. I shook my head. 'Why didn't Mum and Dad tell me?'

'What for? Why upset you too?'

'Can't the police do something about them?'

'Like what? People are perfectly free to post letters wherever and whenever they please in this country,' said Nan.

'Do people really believe that Mum and Dad only let me have the operation for the money they could make?' I asked, appalled at the very idea of it.

'Some do. Your dad has had to put up with a lot of nonsense at work and your mum reckons her company is on the verge of letting her go. They keep getting inundated with

people trying to get in touch with her.'

'But she's not going back until next week.'

'Well, these people either don't know that, or don't believe it, or just don't care,' said Nan.

She bent down to pick up the letters, some still in their envelopes, most just crumpled sheets of paper.

'That's why Mum and Dad wouldn't take the money those two newspapers offered, isn't it?' I realized. 'Because then all those people who accused them of only doing it for the money would think they were right.'

'Your mum and dad wouldn't have taken that money no matter what the circumstances,' Nan told me firmly.

We stuffed the letters back in the drawer. Nan took out a light bulb before firmly pushing the drawer shut. 'Now, I believe you were going to change my light bulb.' She handed the bulb to me.

I nodded and turned to leave the room.

'Cameron?'

'Yes, Nan?'

'Don't let it get you down – OK?'

I forced a smile as I left the kitchen, thinking it was much too late for that. Thousands and thousands of people out there didn't know anything about us except what they'd read



in the newspapers and yet, to them, we were the scum of the earth. And Julie and her mum were among them. I told myself not to mind, not to let them get to me but I'd be lying if I said that at that moment, I didn't feel like shouting at the top of my voice or kicking something.