

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# In Sunshine or In Shadow

Charlotte Bingham

## About the Book

Brougham is the stateliest of stately homes, but for Lady Artemis Deverill it proves a lonely, loveless place. Eleanor Milligan, born in downtown Boston, knows only poverty and a continuing battle against bullying brothers and a sadistic father.

From the moment Artemis and Ellie meet on a liner sailing to Ireland, they are destined to become friends. And when Eleanor's Cousin Rose asks not only Eleanor but also Artemis to stay on at Strand House, County Cork, it marks the start of what is for both of them an idyllic time.

But with the arrival of the devastatingly handsome artist, Hugo Tanner, it seems as though nothing will be quite the same. For in the sunlit pre-war summer, all three become emotionally entwined, with startling consequences that threaten to haunt them for the rest of their lives.

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About the Author

Also by Charlotte Bingham

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# **IN SUNSHINE OR IN SHADOW**

Charlotte Bingham



**BANTAM BOOKS**

LONDON · NEW YORK · TORONTO · SYDNEY · AUCKLAND

For the Duke - with love for the sunshine



From quiet homes and first beginning,  
Out to the undiscovered ends,  
There's nothing worth the wear of winning,  
But laughter and the love of friends.

HILLAIRE BELLOC

## *Prologue*

He stood outside the house waiting for the signal which was given exactly as arranged.

Let in by the back door, through the kitchen, he followed the maid's directions until he arrived at the door of the room. Easing the door open, he saw she was sleeping on a chintz-covered sofa by the fire. The dog was there as well, lying on the rug in front of a log fire.

'It's all right,' the maid whispered, 'he's as deaf as a post now. He won't hear you.' He nodded and eased the door open more. The maid left him, disappearing into the shadows of the hall back to the kitchen.

There were gifts on the floor, at least that's what he took them to be as he carefully tiptoed his way towards her. She was sleeping so peacefully, one arm draped above her tousled head, the other trailing off the sofa so that her long elegant fingers just touched the floor. They had to be gifts because there was wrapping paper in the waste basket and some hand-made tags on the chimney piece. The gifts were some small hand-carved models, figures, some embroidered linen napkins, a book bound in deep red leather, and a water-colour of the dog who still slept on, undisturbed by him.

It was her birthday.

The image before him was so beautiful that for a moment he caught his breath, the girl and her dog, asleep in an elegant room lit by the warm glow of the firelight. She was even lovelier than he remembered. And it was her birthday.

There was also an old-fashioned hat, which looked as though it had been retrimmed, lying on the arm of the sofa, and another book, but an old and much read one, which had fallen open on the floor.

He bent to pick the book up to look at what it was. It was a children's book, open at an illustration of a child in a bed,



with a young girl with long dark hair standing at the foot in nightrobes, holding a candle. He read the caption. 'Who are you?' the little boy was saying. 'Are you a ghost?'

'Who are you?' the young woman on the sofa with the bright blue eyes said to him when she awoke and saw him. 'Are you a ghost?'

'No,' he said. 'Are you?'

1913

# 1

The man who was to kill her mother rode calmly up the drive of the great house. He was mounted on a chestnut thoroughbred who was already becoming over-excited at the thought of the day ahead. His companion rode side-saddle, a beautiful dark-eyed girl in a shiny top hat and immaculate riding habit, mounted on a pure bred iron-grey Arab.

As they rounded the final bend in the long drive and the house came into view, the man reined back his horse, as did his companion.

'I always think,' the man said, 'that Brougham is almost impossibly perfect.'

'I actually prefer Chatsworth,' the girl replied. 'If I had to choose.'

'Too grand,' the young man said. 'Superb but much too grand. The charm of Brougham is that one can live in it.'

They lingered a few moments more to admire the Palladian house which stood before them, beyond an ornamental lake crossed by a fine stone bridge, lying in a fold of the rolling parkland, as if held in the palm of a vast green hand.

'What I love about it,' the young man said, leaning forward in his saddle, 'is its symmetry. The balance of the two wings, those wonderful colonnades, and of course that exquisite pillared portico.'

'Yes,' his companion agreed, adjusting her top hat, 'it's very pretty. But I really would rather have Chatsworth.'

The young man's horse, grown fretful with the wait, pawed the ground and started to back away. 'Come on,' said his rider, 'or we shall miss all the gossip.'

As always with the opening meet there was a splendid turnout, with every invitation issued by the 4th Earl of Deverill, master and owner of the Brougham Fox-hounds,

having been eagerly accepted. The weather was perfect, and a small army of servants, dressed in plum coloured livery, moved through the mounted followers carrying stirrup cups borne high on silver salvers. The brindle hounds, John Deverill's speciality and obsession, stood well to order at one side of the drive with the whippers-in waiting as patiently as they could for the order to move off.

'Wonderful weather, Lady Deverill!' the young man called to his victim as he cantered through the iron gates and reined his horse back to a walk. 'Perfect, I'd say!'

Lady Mary smiled at the young man as he doffed his topper to her, and walked her horse on, uncertain for a moment of her guest's identity. She knew the girl who accompanied him well enough, but her companion's face escaped her.

'That's one of the Stanhope-Murray boys,' a friend told her. 'Charming and utterly feckless and, let it be said, a bit of a "thruster".'

Lady Mary laughed. 'Thank you!' she called over her shoulder. 'I shall do my best to avoid him when hounds are running!'

Looking back at the crowd at the foot of the great stone double staircase, she suddenly caught sight of the familiar blonde head of her daughter and called the nursemaid, who was holding her up to get a better view of all the excitement, to bring her over. The girl handed her charge to Nanny, who immediately straightened the child's dress and re-tied her hair ribbon.

'Thank you, Rosie,' Nanny said to her subordinate, before calling for a way through the throng of servants who had gathered to see hounds move off.

Lady Mary smiled when she saw her daughter, and bent down towards her from her horse.

'Do you want to stroke Capers' nose, darling?' she whispered. 'You know how Capers loves you doing that.'

Nanny walked to the front of the handsome grey gelding and the child put out a small hand to rub his silk-soft muzzle. The horse pushed his nose upwards and snorted, spraying the little girl and making her laugh with delight.

‘You see?’ her mother told her. ‘You see how much he loves you? Nearly as much as I do, my darling,’ she added. She bent down to kiss her child. ‘But not quite, because I love you far too much.’

The little girl would always remember that moment, and the picture of her mother, so beautiful and so elegant in her top hat and long dark riding habit, mounted side-saddle on her famous grey hunter. It would stay with her for the rest of her life.

Nanny hoisted her higher in her arms as the huntsman blew his horn and the hounds moved off. For a moment she lost her mother in the crowd of horses and riders and foot followers, as people jostled for the best position, or to ride alongside their fancy. Then she saw her once more, as she checked her horse in the mêlée before easing him through to take up their regular position at the front.

There was one last wave as they crossed the stone bridge before swinging away right, up the long gentle pull which led to the first draw. Lady Mary Deverill, now clear of the pack and alongside her husband, reined Capers back into a half-rear, blew her daughter an extravagant kiss, raised her hand in the air, and was gone forever.

Early on that morning, that very same morning in October 1913, anyone walking or motoring down Westfield Drive, Boston, Massachusetts, would never have given any of the houses a second glance, so ordinary were they, and none more so than number 1015, a clapboard house like all the others in the street, only one which was in even more urgent need of repainting than most of its neighbours. The small grass lawn at the front was overgrown, the wooden verandah running from the porch along the front of the

house had several posts missing, and the catch on the outer porch door was broken, so that it swung open and shut with a groan and a bang in the ever freshening wind.

A woman arriving at the house fiddled with the lock as she waited for someone to let her in, but finally, with a despairing gesture, gave up the attempt to fix it long before she was admitted.

Next door, in the house on the right, someone had been watching the visitor's arrival from the side of an upstairs window, a middle-aged woman with a startling mass of red hair piled high above a powdered face with a well rouged mouth and plucked and pencilled eyebrows, a woman dressed in a dark crimson gown, of the kind which some years before would have been described in fashionable circles as 'tea gowns'. She was holding a net curtain to one side with the gold-ringed fingers of one hand, while in the other hand she held to her mouth a long white ebony cigarette holder on which she drew constantly as she watched the visitor enter her neighbour's house. Then she waited with a slight frown on her pale white face, as if she might learn something by waiting. But when she heard or saw nothing more, she dropped the net drape back into place, to disappear once more into the darkness of her house.

Outside number 1015 the rest of the world came and went, while the porch door swung open and shut even more frequently, as the October wind strengthened, forcing the few passers-by to bend into what was now turning into a gale and to clutch at their hats. So when the cry came, that first cry which heralds life, had anyone been passing the house at that moment, it is doubtful that they would have heard it. What they might have heard however, had they been passing ten minutes later, even above the noise of the traffic and the raging of the wind, was a roar of someone in pain, a great and agonizing cry. The red-haired woman in the house next door most certainly heard it, and hurried to

another upstairs window to look out the back, for the cry seemed to have come from the yard of her neighbour's house. And sure enough, there her neighbour was, standing half dressed in his yard, with both fists clenched and raised to the skies as he demanded to know of his God why He had chosen to take his wife.

No-one ever told Artemis Deverill that her mother had been killed out hunting that fine October morning, knocked from her horse by the young Stanhope-Murray boy as he tried to thrust his way past her, jumping a hedge and instantly breaking her neck. Later Artemis was told in many indirect ways that her mother was dead, but on the day of the accident she was kept in ignorance.

Of course, she was aware that something had happened, and that whatever it was, was wrong. She knew this from the hushed voices of the nursery staff and from the comings and goings far below her in the great house. Years later, all that she would remember of that fateful day were two things. First, the sight of one of the huntsmen galloping at full speed up the drive, over the bridge and in through the ornamental gates, throwing himself off his still cantering horse, and running into the house through one of the entrances below the main staircase.

'There's been an accident,' one of the nursemaids, catching sight of him, called excitedly. 'There must have been an accident.'

Artemis had been busy drawing, sitting on the window seat of the nursery, high up on the third floor of the family wing. She was drawing a house, a house which had just four windows, one chimney and one door, while Nanny, full of nursery lunch, dozed by the fire. Having finished it, Artemis then sat gazing at her drawing, trying to imagine what it would be like to live in a house with just four windows, one chimney and one door, with just her mother, and perhaps even her father. When she too heard the clatter of the

galloping horse far below she went to the window, but there was no longer anything to see and only the sound of the nursemaids chattering.

The second thing Artemis remembered was being put to bed very early, so early that tea had hardly been cleared. That night, unlike other nights, Nanny sat and stroked her head and held her hand.

‘There’s been an accident,’ she kept saying. ‘There’s been a dreadful accident.’

Artemis had a vague idea as to what accidents were. They were things like a servant getting shot in the chest when a big party went out shooting, or a boat capsizing on the lake, nearly drowning the four occupants. But this accident must be something far more serious, because all the nursery maids were crying, and so, when she looked through the bannisters on her way to bed, were the servants downstairs.

‘What is it please, Nanny?’ she tried to ask when Nanny was tucking her in. ‘Please, what has happened?’

‘Just go to sleep, child,’ Nanny replied. ‘Go to sleep and your papa will come and see you in the morning.’

Artemis lay in the darkened room. Her father never came up to the nursery floor. It was unheard of. She knew then it was her mother who must have been hurt. She called out for someone, but no-one came. She called again and again. Eventually Rosie, the youngest of the nursery maids, pushed the door open a fraction, a handkerchief to her face.

‘Go to sleep, pet.’

‘What’s happened, Rosie?’

‘You’ll find out in the morning,’ Rosie replied, her voice floating towards Artemis through the handkerchief. ‘You just go to sleep, pet.’

In the morning her father arrived up in the nursery. Artemis knew it was him before she saw him, because even before he was in the room everyone stood up, and Nanny as always straightened Artemis’s dress, tugging it at the back.



He dismissed the nursery staff with a peremptory wave of his index finger, leaving only Artemis alone with him.

‘Yes,’ he said, after clearing his throat. ‘Look here, there’s been a bit of an accident. Couldn’t be helped. One of those things, I’m afraid.’

Artemis frowned, but said nothing, wondering what was to come. Her mother had fallen off Capers, that much she knew. And that was why everyone had been crying. For a moment her father said nothing more either, he just stood with his hands clasped behind him, looking up at the ceiling. Artemis attempted a smile to reassure him that she at least wasn’t going to let him down by crying, but he paid her no attention. Instead, he turned away to stare at the picture of her mother which was on the chest of drawers. He picked it up and held it away from him while he looked at it. Then he replaced it.

‘Nice picture,’ he said finally. ‘Very nice indeed. Anyway. About the accident.’ He cleared his throat once more and resumed staring up at the ceiling. ‘Happened when we were out, do you see. Nasty business. And the long and the short of it I’m afraid is, your mother’s gone.’

He turned and walked over to the window where he stood looking out with his hands clasped behind his back. Artemis didn’t understand what he meant, but dared not ask him.

‘So there you are,’ her father concluded, once again clearing his throat. ‘Terrible business, I’m afraid, but there you are. These things will happen.’ He left without turning back, without looking at her.

When Nanny returned at last Artemis asked her what her father had meant by saying her mother had gone.

‘Because I’m afraid she has, dear,’ Nanny replied. ‘She’s gone where we all must follow.’

‘I see,’ Artemis said, without seeing. ‘But where, Nanny? Where’s she gone?’

‘She’s crossed over, dear,’ Nanny sighed, ‘gone to Kingdom come. Your poor mother has been gathered.’

‘Will I ever see her again, Nanny? If she’s gone?’

‘Of course you will, dear. We all will.’ She nodded briskly. ‘Time for your walk.’

That night Artemis prayed silently to God that if she was going to see her mother, then she hoped it would be soon.

They buried Lady Mary Deverill without her daughter knowing. It had been decided that the child was too young to understand and as a result she might suffer unpleasant after-effects, rather as people tend to do after eating something which disagrees with them. So prior to the funeral, which was to be held in the church attached to the great house, Artemis was despatched with her nanny to Scotland, to stay with relations in a remote castle, where once more no reference whatsoever was made to the tragedy.

It was all intended for the best. The reasoning behind it being that she would not be able to come to terms with the notion of her mother being dead, so by removing her from the place where the tragedy had occurred and allowing enough time to pass, she would better be able to come to terms with her loss. It was also to be hoped, her father told her nanny prior to their departure, that by the time his daughter was returned to Brougham, the memory of her mother would already be fading.

In the very same week as Lady Mary Deverill was being laid to her final rest in the family churchyard at Brougham, across the Atlantic Ocean, in the statue packed graveyard of the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Westfield, Boston, Massachusetts, the recently bereaved Patrick Milligan entertained a very different hope from the father of the little girl in England. For as he watched the cheap pine coffin being lowered into the frosty ground, Patrick Joseph Garrett Milligan vowed that the person responsible for the untimely death of his beautiful wife Kathleen should live to regret, forever and always, the moment of her wretched birth.

On the eve of her seventh birthday, Nanny told Artemis that she had been invited downstairs that very afternoon to take tea with her father. The thought of such a thing terrified the child. She had hardly seen her father in all the weeks since returning from Scotland, nearly five months after the 'accident' as it was known. Once the hunting season was over he had gone straight off to Ireland to fish, and then, on the outbreak of war, had promptly rejoined his regiment, and as their colonel-in-chief had made several sorties to France during the next three years. When he wasn't abroad, he was at his house in London. He rarely seemed either to have the time or the inclination to return to Brougham.

Artemis saw her father twice during all this time. The first time she was playing marbles with Rosie in the saloon, when the double doors swung open and he appeared as if from nowhere, a tall and very upright figure, still in his colonel's uniform. Rosie at once scrambled to her feet, the marbles she had in her lap dropping and clattering over the polished wood floors.

Artemis, down on her knees, just turned round and stared for a moment, before Rosie took her hand and pulled her to her feet.

'Excuse us, your lordship,' Rosie apologized. 'But, like, no-one said you was home.'

'Perfectly all right, girl,' Lord Deverill replied, after a moment spent staring at Artemis. 'That's perfectly all right. Carry on.' Then with a couple of brief nods at them both, he crossed the saloon and left through the other double doors.

Artemis and Rosie both stood in silent uncertainty for a moment before Rosie began to pick up the marbles and put them back in their small cloth sack. Artemis helped her and they both instinctively began to hurry, lest Artemis's father should return and find them still there, even though he had given his permission. Then they ran out of the saloon and up the backstairs as quickly as they could, to resume their game in the safety of the nursery.

The other time Artemis saw him was one day when she and Nanny were returning from a walk by the lake. Her father was just leaving in a blue Rolls-Royce. The car didn't stop as it passed them. It barely slowed down. Nanny held Artemis aside and told her to wave, which she did. Her father raised his hand once, hardly sparing a second glance. Artemis, on tiptoes, saw there was another person in the back of the car, a woman with bobbed blonde hair, wearing a pale fur coat, and smoking a cigarette. She too waved briefly at Artemis and smiled fleetingly, before the Rolls swept away and finally out of view.

And now Artemis was to go to tea downstairs with her father.

'What shall I say?' she asked Nanny.

'You won't have to say anything,' Nanny reassured her, smoothing down her best dress. 'Speak when you're spoken to, but otherwise don't say a word. Little children should just be seen, you know that. Seen but not heard.'

'I feel sick, Nanny,' Artemis complained.

'Of course you do, child,' Nanny replied. 'But never mind, never mind. Just speak when spoken to, that's all. Speak when spoken to and you'll be fine.'

Tea had been laid in the blue drawing room, a vast room dominated by two huge chandeliers and an enormous portrait of Henry VIII after Holbein, which hung over the fireplace. Lord Deverill was standing down the far end of the room, staring out of a window across the estate.

The butler had opened the door to announce them, but even before he had finished, Artemis's father cut him short.

'Thank you!' he called. 'That will do, thank you!'

Nanny left once she had pushed Artemis into the room. There was no-one else there, just a maid, whom Artemis couldn't remember ever seeing before, waiting to serve tea.

'Good,' her father called from his window. 'Come to tea, right? Good. So give her a lemonade, will you? And a fancy or whatever.'

In response to his instructions, the maid pulled up a chair for the little girl, and Artemis carefully sat on the edge of it, her legs still too short to reach the floor. The maid then shook out a large linen table napkin which she placed across the lap of Artemis's best frock. Still her father stared out of the window.

'Treating you all right, I suppose?' he asked suddenly.

'Yes thank you, Papa,' Artemis replied, not understanding at all what her father meant.

'Jolly good,' he said. 'Well done.'

There was a long silence, during which the maid offered her a muffin from under a silver dish. Artemis took one and quickly started to eat it. They never had muffins in the nursery.

'So there you are then,' her father said, breaking the silence. 'So it's your sixth birthday tomorrow then. Jolly good.'

'No it's my seventh, Papa,' Artemis said. 'Tomorrow I shall be seven.'

'Oh well,' her father sighed, without looking round. 'It'll all be the same in a thousand years.' He paused and reclasped his hands behind his back. 'Expect you'd like to make a day of it, yes?'

Artemis frowned at her father, away up the room and then nodded. 'Yes,' she said. 'Yes please, Papa.'

'Good. Point is, won't be here for tea. Got to get back to London.' Her father took a silver case from his pocket and withdrew a cigarette, which he tapped on a thumbnail before putting it in his mouth and lighting it. 'No, got to get back to London, do you see. For dinner. So thought we'd go for a ride in the morning. Jenkins says you're quite useful on that pony of yours. Yes?'

'I don't know, Papa,' Artemis answered, brushing some cake crumbs off her dress.

'What Jenkins says.'

'I'd love to go riding though. Please.'

Her father tapped the ash off his cigarette into his cupped hand and then blew it into the air. 'Good. That's all fixed then. Good.' He cleared his throat and continued to stare out of the window for a couple of moments longer. 'Good,' he said finally, then turned on his heel and left the room.

Since her father had not stipulated the exact time when they were to ride, Artemis was dressed and in the stables at first light lest she miss her treat by being late. Jenkins, just too old for combat, was the only groom left at Brougham, but he was already up and mucking out the boxes, for he still had six horses to do. The best half dozen hunters were still in, even though there was no hunting and no-one to ride them except Jenkins and a girl groom seconded from the village. The rest of the animals had been roughed off and turned away in a distant paddock. The young staff might have all gone to Flanders, but Lord Deverill's horses had not yet been volunteered.

'I in't done Buttons yet, your ladyship,' Jenkins apologized when he saw Artemis. 'I just in't 'ad the time.'

'It's all right,' Artemis replied, 'I'll do him. I like doing him.'

They barely talked while Jenkins started to groom a tall strong chestnut for his master and Artemis groomed her dark bay pony. They had both animals ready and saddled up in half an hour, which was as well, because five minutes later, on the stroke of half past seven, Lord Deverill himself arrived, accompanied by four couples of hounds.

'Thought we might have a bit of sport,' he announced generally. 'Hounds could do with a run.'

'Don't you go too bold now,' Jenkins muttered to Artemis as he checked her girths. 'Don't you go trying to do anything beyond you.'

'Let her ladyship do that, man!' Lord Deverill called as he swung himself effortlessly into the saddle. 'Otherwise if she kills herself it'll be your doing!'

'The catches be a bit tight on these little saddles, your lordship,' Jenkins replied, continuing to check the buckles. 'They're that tight they needs strong fingers.'

'Ready?' Lord Deverill asked his daughter, as if Jenkins had not even spoken.

'Yes, Papa,' Artemis said, as Buttons put in a goodnatured buck.

'Your hands are too high,' her father said. 'You're riding. Not driving.' Then he kicked his horse forward and led on out of the yard.

It was a beautiful November morning, cold but clear. The hounds' and the horses' breath lay on the air, while a light frost still crisped the grass. Artemis put her heels down, straightened her back and softened her rein, so that by the time she caught her father up, she had Buttons perfectly controlled. Her father glanced down at her, but said nothing. Instead he kicked his horse on into a canter behind the hounds. Artemis followed suit and they headed away from the house up a long pull which led to a covert known as the King's Bushes.

As they rode, Artemis pushing Buttons on to keep pace with the free-striding chestnut, her father never spoke. Whenever she rode out with Jenkins, he always called to her what they were about to do, whether they were going to trot, or canter, jump or gallop. Her father said nothing. He just, on occasion, looked over to see how she was going, and then rode on. He didn't even nominate their first jump, which was a three-foot post and rails. He simply put his horse at it, then rode on. Fortunately Artemis had often jumped this particular fence with Jenkins, and Buttons sailed over it, which was as well since there was no other way forward. Next they met a small brook which Artemis and Buttons had also jumped previously, and which they flew again, and finally, before reaching the King's Bushes, they met a low but wide hedge. Buttons reached for it and it wasn't until they were flying it that Artemis saw the four-

foot drop the other side. Ahead, her father's horse had pecked slightly on landing, throwing his rider up his neck. Buttons landed perfectly and came away from the jump so well that by the time her father had collected himself and his horse Artemis and Buttons were alongside them.

'Good,' Lord Deverill said as they drew up. 'Yes, that's the ticket.'

They waited a long time while the hounds drew the covert. Artemis's father smoked a cigarette and said nothing. Early on Buttons fidgeted, earning a look of disapproval from Lord Deverill. Artemis sat back, heels down, and he quickly settled.

Then the absolute quiet of the early morning was broken by the sound of hounds suddenly giving tongue.

'Right,' Lord Deverill said. 'Seems they've found.'

The hounds crashed out of the far side of the covert and swung away from Artemis and her father uphill. Ahead of them, Artemis got her first view of a fox in full flight, and found herself hesitating. Even from that distance, she could sense the feeling of panic as the animal flew across the open fields, its brush stuck out straight behind it. Then there was no time for further thought, as Buttons, excited by the baying of the hounds and the sound of Lord Deverill's hunting horn on which he was blowing a thrilling series of quick notes, took hold of his bit and flew. Artemis battled for control, but it was a fight soon lost, and from then on she was a passenger as her pony galloped in hot pursuit of horse, hound and fox.

Ahead, her father was riding alongside the hounds, at full stretch. But he was taking a cautious line, mindful of the child behind him. Instead of flying the hedges he went for gateways or gaps and Artemis, seeing what he was doing, managed to steer her bolting pony on the same course. They ran through field after field, with the hounds all the time slowly gaining on the fox. And then suddenly, just as Artemis felt Buttons was beginning to tire and that she was



regaining control, as they topped a hill and began the run down the opposite side, a hedge loomed up in front of her, divided by a solid looking five-bar gate which was firmly closed.

She was still some way behind her father's horse, whom she saw her father checking as he realized there was no way through. The hounds, however, having wriggled under and through the gate, were still running, streaming away from them across the next field as the fox headed for the nearby covert. Artemis saw her father turn his horse towards her and raise a hand.

'Stop!' he shouted. 'Pull up, girl! There's no way through!'

Artemis sat back and pulled on her reins as hard as she could. But Buttons still had hold and if anything quickened as he galloped at the hedge. Artemis could hear her father still calling to her to turn her pony, but there was nothing she could do. The hedge was fast approaching, looking too big, far too big for Buttons to jump on his own. So instead of closing her eyes and praying, Artemis opened them wide and kicked on.

Buttons arched his back and leapt. Artemis threw the reins at his head so that nothing would check him. She didn't even look down. She just looked through her pony's ears at where she hoped he would land. Which he did, a good two feet clear of the gaping open ditch which lay on the blind side of the hedge.

Lord Deverill, having watched in silence, seeing his daughter was safe, popped his big horse over the gate and galloped on to the covert where hounds had checked, and so too finally had Buttons.

'I think the fox has gone to ground, Papa,' Artemis said breathlessly, pointing into the woods. 'In that hole over there.'

'Fair enough,' her father replied. 'We'll give him best.'

Picking up his hounds, Lord Deverill turned his horse and started to walk away from the covert, followed by Artemis.

They left the field by a different route, going out through a hunting gate on the far side, before swinging back alongside the woods at the top of the park.

‘Good pony you’ve got there, young lady,’ Artemis’s father said to her some time later, as they walked quietly on. ‘That was a quick thing, you know. That was a dashed quick thing.’

And that was all that was said on the way home. Artemis’s father broke the silence now and then by humming tunelessly to himself, but he never spoke another word, not even after they had ridden into the yard and handed their horses over to Jenkins.

And Artemis had never been happier in all her life.

It wasn’t until they had climbed the stone steps leading up to the house that she learned the truth of the matter.

‘That last hedge you jumped,’ her father said, breaking another seemingly endless silence as he stopped and stared up at the facade of the great house. ‘That was the hedge that accounted for your mother.’

Eleanor Mary Milligan, as she was hastily christened the same week her mother was buried, seemed to know from the moment she came into this world at number 1015 Westfield Avenue that in order to survive she must be good and quiet, and not be any trouble to her father or brothers. In fact she was such a quiet baby that sometimes when her father came home drunk on Friday nights he would fondly imagine she had joined her blessed mother in heaven.

‘God love us,’ he would mutter as he stumbled upstairs, ‘and now wouldn’t that be a thing? Wouldn’t it only be right that she should go, too?’

Some nights he would stand by Eleanor’s cot, convinced she had stopped breathing, and do nothing. He never tried to wake her, instead he would just stand and watch and pray that the angels had in fact gathered her and justice had been done. But then the baby would stir in its sleep and

put up one tiny pink hand, perhaps seeking for something to hold on to. Patrick Milligan would sigh despairingly as if God had deserted him, before wandering drunkenly off to his own, now single, bed, where he lay cursing his miserable lot before falling into a deep and whisky sodden sleep.

Having lost her mother the moment she was born, the baby needed a nursemaid, so Patrick Milligan had hired the rat-faced Mrs MacDonagh who lived opposite. For the first month of her life Mrs MacDonagh had taken the baby into her own house, along with Eleanor's eighteen-month-old brother Patrick, and she had bottle fed the baby and kept an eye on her brother amidst the debris of her own life and the squalor of her enormous family. Once the feeding routine had been established, the baby and her brother were returned home at nights, since Mr MacDonagh, who worked with Eleanor's father as a building worker, had threatened to leave home if his wife got up once more in the middle of the night to feed a child which wasn't their own. So it was agreed that while Mrs MacDonagh would go on looking after the two youngest Milligans during the day, Dermot, Fergal and Mike, the eldest brothers, would take over as soon as they were back from school.

Not surprisingly, neither of the older boys appreciated their extra duties. With their mother gone they already had more than their fair share of shopping and cooking. Inevitably they took out their frustrations on Ellie and 'Patsy', as they had nick-named their youngest brother, leaving it to him to remember his sister's bottle when the others had left her crying, or to make endless attempts to keep her amused.

Mrs MacDonagh certainly had no love for children, even her own, and absolutely no time at all for young Ellie. And forced as she was by circumstances to bring her own dirty and vicious brood to work with her, she took a great pleasure in letting them loose on the two youngest Milligans, deliberately ignoring their torments and teases.

Patsy was a sickly child, growing very little in the first few years of his life. Weak and under-nourished, he barely survived a dose of diphtheria, which left him weaker than before, and an even softer target for the torments of his three hefty brothers.

The greatest laugh they enjoyed was pretending Patsy was a little girl. They would hide all his own clothes and, having forced him to wear his sister's, they would lock him out in the street to be chased and bullied by the neighbourhood gangs. When they were feeling particularly spiteful, they would blindfold the 'two sisters' as they were known and, as darkness fell, leave them in some unknown part of the neighbourhood to find their own way home. Little wonder that Ellie learned from an early age to defend Patsy in any way she could. Certainly, no day of their early childhood ever ended without one or both of them being beaten up by someone.

Their father made no attempt to intercede. On the contrary, he went out of his way to encourage his three eldest boys, the 'broth' as he called them, in their bullying.

'Tell us,' their father would ask the 'broth' nightly. 'And what have your sisters been doing today?'

The 'broth' would laugh, and while they were laughing would kick and pinch the two youngest under the table, and while Ellie and Patsy were rubbing their bruises, steal the food off their plates.

This constant persecution only served to throw Ellie and Patsy together. They came to the kind of unspoken understanding real twins enjoy. They soon learned not to talk when just a look would do, and even when separated, each seemed to know instinctively when the other was in trouble. This particularly infuriated Dermot, the pack leader, and sometimes he would knock Patsy about so badly that finally his father told him off, not for hitting the little boy, but because Patsy's subsequent sobs kept Patrick Milligan senior from his sleep.

When her fourth birthday dawned, Ellie secretly hoped that it might be a day just a little different from all the others. She had seen her three elder brothers enjoying their birthdays and being fussed over by their father, but neither her's nor Patsy's birthday had ever been celebrated. When she woke up that morning, with just a small hope in the corner of her heart, she found Patsy already awake, sitting upright in the old cot they still shared, his dark brown eyes shining with excitement from under his mop of brown hair.

'Happy birthday, Ellie,' he whispered, handing her a gift. 'That's for you.'

Ellie opened it. It was a birthday card, hand-made by her brother out of cardboard. He had painted a greeting on the front and inside had drawn a picture of an animal and signed his name.

'That's a dog,' he grinned. 'In case you didn't know.'

'Thank you, Patsy,' Ellie whispered back. 'I shall keep it for ever and ever.'

She tucked the precious card under her pillow and then got out of her cot to get dressed. Both she and Patsy still had to sleep in a cot because their father had not bothered as yet to buy them each a proper bed. They both got dressed, quickly and silently, and then tiptoed out of the bedroom and down the white painted wooden staircase. It was a Saturday, their father was sleeping in, as were their three elder brothers, so for once they had some time to play by themselves, which they did in the yard. They played hopscotch, their favourite, in the ever brightening sunshine, throwing a white pebble into the boxes they had marked out on the ground, and then trying to hop to where the pebble landed without touching any lines.

"Allo?" A voice called to them from above.

Both children stopped playing and looked up to see who had called them. It was their next door neighbour, the woman with the red hair. She was standing and smiling down at them from an upstairs window.

‘Would you like some cookies maybe?’ she asked. ‘I ‘ave made some. So if you like, come and I will let you in the kitchen.’

Patsy looked at Ellie to see what they should do. No-one had ever offered them cookies before, particularly not their strange-sounding neighbour, whom they hardly ever saw.

‘It’s all right!’ the woman laughed, as if guessing their thoughts. ‘I shall not eat you!’ Then with a beckoning wave she disappeared from the window.

Encouraged by their neighbour’s cheeriness, Ellie and her brother went round to the back of her house and shyly waited to be let in. After a moment the woman threw open the door.

‘*Voilà!*’ she said.

Neither Ellie nor Patsy knew where to look, because the woman was still in her dressing gown. So they both stared religiously at the ground pink-faced. Their father never opened their front door without first pulling on his coat, no matter what state he was in, and none of the boys were ever allowed to admit a visitor while they or anyone else was in a state of undress.

‘Good ‘eavens!’ the woman laughed. ‘Whatever is wrong? You have never seen a woman in her *peignoir* before?’

Ellie wasn’t at all sure what a *peignoir* was, but if it was what the woman was wearing, no she most certainly had not. Nonetheless, she remained silent.

‘Come, come,’ their neighbour said, taking them both by the hand. ‘Do not be shy.’ And she led them inside her house and through to her kitchen. ‘There,’ she said, taking a jar from the sideboard and placing it on the table. ‘Please. You ‘ave just as many as you like.’

Patsy looked at Ellie and Ellie looked at Patsy, but neither moved. The woman waited with a smile on her face, then sighed and took a cookie out for herself, from which she then took a good bite.

‘OK?’ she asked. ‘They are not *poison!*’