

In each of the frames she finds black and white prints. Several portraits of Elena, and one misty nude of her holding a baby to her breast. The other three photographs are too much. Lizzie's legs buckle, she realises that she shouldn't have come out with a temperature. She is on her knees, eyes involuntarily closing in her head, which feels too heavy for her neck. When she looks again, the portraits are still there, as before: three stark images amongst the candles. They are of herself. One as a baby, another as a toddler on Elena's lap and the third – how could it be? – a double profile, like the trick pictures that appear to be people one moment and a candlestick the next. A double profile of her four-year-old self nose to nose with Jack Seymour.

Elena has still not returned with the tea and the house is silent. Lizzie stumbles back across the floor to the chair, tries to steady her breathing. The cat snakes onto her lap, soft as warm clay, and starts to purr and, at last, she hears the rattling of porcelain and Elena glides back into the room bearing a tray.

'Excellent,' she says setting the tray down. 'I see you have

made friends with Ying. Ying is a good judge of character, aren't you Ying?

'Ying?'

'Yes, handsome, isn't he? A lavender Burmese. I have others. Tell me, little one, do you like cats?'

'Yes . . . Elena, do I already know you?' Lizzie's voice is quavering but Elena appears not to hear her as she lifts the lid on the teapot.

'Lord. Now I've forgotten the milk. Help yourself to a biscuit. I'm afraid they're not chocolate. You like chocolate, don't you? I'm sure you do.' Elena is on her feet again and Lizzie stands too, puts her shaking fingers to Elena's wrist.

'The photographs . . .' she says. 'I don't understand.'

'Perhaps I'll fetch us a proper drink,' says Elena, covering Lizzie's bitten fingers with her own cloudy hand. 'After all, it's New Year's Eve. Do you like champagne? Oh dear, perhaps I shouldn't though. Do little girls drink alcohol?'

'I'm nineteen.'

'Yes, of course you are. Nineteen. I suppose you would be by now. But you're such a little thing, you must excuse me. Time does strange things when you get to my age. Please sit.'

Elena's pale eyes shimmer. 'Nineteen,' she whispers, again, and she presses her fingers to Lizzie's face, feeling her cheeks and temples as though searching for the skeleton beneath the flesh. Like a blind woman. 'Beautiful,' she sighs. 'But tragic. I wish I'd found you before now. You're not happy, are you?'

Lizzie bites her lip, tries to stop herself shaking as Elena's icicle fingers trace her jaw. 'What am I to you?' she says, terrified of the answer. 'Why am I in those photographs over there?'

Elena takes her hands from Lizzie's face. Her eyes blaze. 'You don't know, do you?' Lizzie shakes her head. She has a flashing image of herself standing by a plate-glass window, unable to

move although she knows at any moment there will be an explosion, the noise of a thousand firecrackers and razor shards will fly into her, the innocent bystander. Recently she's been unable to walk past shopfronts without considering the possibility. And stranger danger has been shadowing her for days, lurking in the supermarket queue, in the dark outlines of men walking towards the night bus. Cars might veer out of control and mount the pavement where she walks, psychopaths on the loose, hammers falling from building sites.

'I always wondered if he even told Cordelia about me,' continues Elena. 'About poor Laura. It would be so typical of him to keep it all to himself. Your father is a moral coward. Do you really know nothing of this? Oh dear, you don't look well. Let me get you a blanket, you're shaking.'