

# PROLOGUE

From Rachel Dower to Katy Dower

Sent 4 January 18:01

Hey Katy, how are you? How was Christmas in the end?  
Sorry I left you with Mum, Danny wanted to spend it  
with his family. What did you think of your present? I  
thought the plant would look great in your rooftop garden!

Love, Rachel x

From Katy Dower to Rachel Dower

Sent 5 January 00:45

Hey, didn't want to spend Christmas with Mum and her  
massive new family so went to Dad's. He asked about you.  
I said you might give him a ring in the new year?

Thanks for the plant, yes, it looks fab on the rooftop. It's  
right next to the Shard. What did you think of that vegan  
cookbook? I use it all the time.

K xx

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From Rachel Dower to Katy Dower

Sent 6 January 08:07

Love the cookbook! The sweet potato brownies are great. x

From Rachel Dower to Katy Dower

Sent 15 February 08:06

Hey Katy,

Just got a notification to say that your membership to Food Glow hasn't been used, remember you need to sign up by the end of Feb otherwise it automatically cancels? I did say to the girl that you had been into the shop so she's looking into it.

Love, Rachel x

From Katy Dower to Rachel Dower

Sent 15 February 08:07

Hey,

That is weird because I have used it? Look, I made this spelt spinach cake.

From Katy Dower to Food Glow

FAO Kelly

Sent 15 February 08:15

Hi Kelly!

Thank you so much for all your help on the phone! As I said, my sister bought me membership last year to Food Glow, which I was super excited about, but when I came to register I couldn't (because of my ex-fling Larry working there, and yes, you're right, he is a total shit). Anyway, Rachel will never understand that, so if you could

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please send her an email saying that there's been a mistake and I *have* registered then that would be so great! I know you're worried about your manager, but please feel free to forward him my email!!!

With very best wishes,  
Katy Dower

From Rachel Dower to Katy Dower  
Sent 15 February 08:20

Wow, that cake looks amazing. It's like something out of a book! What recipe did you use?

From Katy Dower to Rachel Dower  
Sent 15 February 08:30

I'll post it to you.

From Katy Dower to Rachel Dower  
Sent 3 March 22:15

Hey!

Know you love running, and just saw an advert for Super Bike, have you seen it!?! Looks amazing and an easy way to get fit. Thinking of buying it! What do you think?

K x

From Rachel Dower to Katy Dower  
Sent 4 March 07:45

Hi Katy,

Have you bought this?!

No, I haven't seen these advertised, but just looked them up and seen they are two thousand pounds! They look like

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a total con, and I would 100% say not to buy one. Why don't you start jogging? That's free!

Also if you are rich enough to spend two grand on a bike then please can you transfer me your half of Mum's birthday present.

Love you,  
Rachel

From Katy Dower to Rachel Dower

Sent 4 March 09:08

Hey,

Thanks for the advice. Don't worry, I didn't buy one.

K

# CHAPTER ONE

## KATY

I glance anxiously back at the house, the bedroom window flickering from the reflection of the television. The fat van crunches over the gravel, casually trampling one of Fiona's precious rose bushes and dragging the plump pale pink flowers under the tyres. My eyes flit back up to the window, waiting for Fiona to fling it open and demand me to tell her what the hell is going on.

I bite my lip, willing the driver to hurry up as the engine rumbles with enough force to awaken the Kraken.

I had no idea he would be this late! What sort of courier delivers a bike at ten thirty at night? Not that I'll say that to him. I've been waiting since three o'clock for this bloody bike to arrive; there is no way I am saying anything to piss him off. If he drives off with it, I'll cry.

The driver hops out of the van, slamming the door behind

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him with a loud thwack. I jump as the echo reverberates through me and force myself to smile at the man. His head is a perfect circle and completely hairless, and he has large folds of skin gathered under his eyes that pull his entire face downwards like anchors. He looks exhausted.

He'll be even more exhausted when he realises where I need him to carry my bike.

'Are you Katy?' he says, his voice thick with a Scottish accent.

'Yes,' I say, my hand twitching as I fight between the awkward urge to wave or shake his hand.

He stomps towards the back of the van and I scuttle after him, trying to make as little noise as possible. He reaches forward and flicks a tab at the bottom of the metal door, triggering it to shoot up with a rattle as though it's holding an army of pot-wielding tap dancers. I feel my hands clench into fists by my side.

*Oh my God, why is it so loud?*

He catches my stricken face and scowls at me.

'You did order a bike?' he says, pulling out his phone and squinting at the screen. 'The Super Bike?'

My stomach twitches.

Yes, yes, I did order the Super Bike. I did sign up for a finance plan for the next two years to pay for a bike I can only afford if I eat Tesco own-brand food until I die and never use fabric softener and wear the same pants for the rest of my life even if they have an unfortunate hole or fall down every time I sneeze.

But who knows? Maybe I'll use this bike every day and look so fantastic that a billionaire will fall in love with me who has shares in fabric softener and then I'll be glad I bought the bike. Thank God I bought this bike, I'll say. And then I'll send Rachel

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a photo of me sat on a yacht with my new beau, smiling smugly into the camera whilst subtly showing off my new, perfectly ripe arse.

‘Yes,’ I say, ‘yes, that is for me. I live down the bottom of the garden.’

I feel my face flush as it always does whenever I admit to anyone where I live, which is very rare. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t live under a flowerpot like Bill and Ben, I just live in my boss’s back garden (in the annexe) so I can be the perfect PA to her highly successful events company.

Oh, and so I can also be the perfect nanny. Not that it was part of the job description, nor in the small print of my contract. No, it was more that Fiona literally pointed at my little home and told the children that I would love nothing more than to play hide-and-seek, and now, three years later, I’m trapped like a hostile Mary Poppins who’s run out of places to hide.

I look over my shoulder at the narrow path that winds down to my small home, and then back at the man. He doesn’t look impressed.

‘Right,’ he says. ‘Can I move my van closer?’

If he got any closer to the house, he’d be parked in Fiona’s front room.

I chew on my lip. ‘Er,’ I say, ‘no. Sorry. But I can help you carry it!’ I add brightly, offering my matchstick arms towards him as if I’m the answer to all his problems.

He cocks his head and climbs inside the van. ‘You’re going to have to,’ he says, and my arms wilt.

I peer inside the van, which is practically empty apart from one large box glowering at me from the corner.

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I watch as the man slams his body weight onto the box, shoving it towards me.

I feel myself tense.

Was it a good idea to offer to help lift this? Am I really going to be able to do it?

‘Right,’ he puffs, ‘ready?’

I jump to attention as the box suddenly tilts towards me. My hands grip the edge of it and I feel a surge of heat rush through my arms.

I shall not drop this box. This box contains the reason I’m not having takeaways for the next two years (minimum). I must carry it to safety. It is literally my most prized possession.

The delivery man eases himself out of the back of the van and the box lunges towards me, and before I know what’s going on, I’m hobbling backwards down the drive like an unenthused crab. An unenthused crab with a serious yeast infection.

This is not the luxury experience I was hoping for when I ordered this bike. Honestly, why don’t they have more than one delivery driver? He’s lucky I’m a naturally strong, independent woman. What would he have done if I had broken my arm? Or was heavily pregnant? Or, you know, just didn’t want to carry it?

‘Is it just straight on?’ he says, his gruff voice reverberating around the garden.

‘Yes,’ I hiss back, willing him to be quiet.

The last thing I want is for Fiona to hear a mysterious man’s voice following me down the garden path in the dead of night. I don’t want her to think I’m sneaking Scottish men into my flat like a secret temptress.

Not that she’d care. If anything, she’d love it and pluck me



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raw for all the juicy details over coffee the next morning, using code words the children can't understand.

I say the children; the first time it happened, she kept asking if I had 'captured the goat', and to this day I have no idea what she was talking about.

(I said I had, as this seemed to be the answer she wanted. She was delighted.)

I try not to shriek as my foot lands in a patch of mud and slides off to the side.

Bloody hell, how does anyone walk like this? The Chuckle Brothers made it look so easy! It is totally unreasonable for anyone to be expected to walk backwards in this weird position. I mean, there is a reason why it's only crabs that walk sideways.

A gust of wind whips my thick hair in front of my eyes and I shake my head about like a distressed horse.

'Just down here,' I manage between puffs of air.

'Oh yeah,' he replies. 'I can see it. Cute little place.'

'Thank you,' I say, craning my strained neck to see, to my relief, that we have arrived at my cabin.

That's what I call it: 'The Cabin'. It's a beautiful little lodge, with my own squashy armchairs and perfectly fitted kitchen. Fiona and her husband Tristan had it built just before I arrived, in hopes of an au pair appearing and casually teaching them all French. She was thrilled when I applied to be her PA and told her I was moving from Wales to start a new life in London.

I mean, I was applying to be PA to the events director. Not PA to Fiona Cunningham and her entire family. But whatever. It has its perks. I mean, there is a reason I'm still here three years later.

'Okay,' I say, 'so if we just put it down, I'll open the door.'

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I've barely finished speaking when the man starts to dip into a deep squat. I fight the urge to scream in pain as my poor thighs tremble under the weight of the box.

*Christ!* Who does he think I am? The only time I squat is when I'm avoiding a toilet seat!

The box lands on the ground with a thump and I fumble around for my keys.

'Do you need help bringing it inside?' he says, looking back up the garden, not bothering to hide his desperation to leave.

I click the door open and flash him a smile.

'Just through the door, please,' I say. 'I'll set it up.'

He gives the box a final shove with his shoulder, and it slides through my front door. He pulls himself to standing and turns his iPhone towards me. I push my long hair off my face, shoving it behind my ears roughly, and scribble my signature, then look at the bike, my heart thumping in my ears.

'Thanks.' He shoots me a thumbs-up and stomps back down the garden. I watch him leave and then slowly push my front door shut, the familiar silence of the cabin falling around me.

I just won't mention it to Rachel again until I'm sure it's a good idea. That's the way I've been living for the past three years, and it's been going pretty well.

It's not lying; it's just that there are some aspects of my life I've never told her about.

What's the big deal?

★

I feel myself stir as the bright white light of the sun streams over my face. Every night for the past three years I have slept

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with my face next to the window. It means I wake as the sun rises each morning.

It makes me feel quite peaceful and at one with nature, like Snow White. Although I bet Snow White didn't consider murdering a pair of foxes who thought that outside my bedroom window was the perfect place to start a family.

I open my eyes, shielding them from the sun as I peer up the garden towards the main house. I can see William's shadow against the blue blind, sitting up on his bed and scratching his head. He's probably reading; he knows he's not allowed out of bed before six. Jasmine will still be asleep, which isn't unusual.

I roll onto my front and pick up my phone, feeling a tingle of nerves as I look at the date: 13 March. Two days before the charity ball, the first event Fiona has let me properly work on. Which means that today, I am going into the office.

I look down at my outfit, perfectly laid out on the chair beneath me. My bed is made up of a large mattress and duvet, with about thirty old pillows, tucked away on the mezzanine section of the cabin. I've stuck some photos on the wall next to my pillows, and sometimes pull a string of fairy lights up if there is a storm outside and the place gets particularly dark.

They're all photos Rachel took – she's always had a knack for photography – which means they are from our teenage years, when we spent real time together. There's one of me and Dad grinning over a birthday cake, a photo of the four of us standing on a cliff edge in Pembrokeshire, the Welsh air pinching at our cheeks and our arms linked around each other as our shiny sunburnt faces beam at the camera. Then there's one of Rachel, me and our grandma, with Rachel's arm stretched out in front of us holding the camera. That's my favourite one. Our cheeks

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are pressed to either side of Grandma's face, my teenage braces glinting in the light and Rachel's circular glasses propped on her button nose. Grandma is grinning mischievously at the camera. There was always a light in Grandma's eyes, a certain twinkle of naughtiness. Even when she was really sick, she'd look at you as though she was sitting on the most delicious gossip, or about to burst into ripples of giggles at a prank she had in store for one of the neighbours.

As twins go, Rachel and I are practically identical. Although Rachel now has a blunt fringe, and my nose turns up slightly at the end whereas hers sits neatly on her face. Which sums us up really. Rachel has always been perfectly organised and in control, with nothing out of place, whereas I'm the flyaway. Grandma never let us take ourselves too seriously, and she certainly never let us fight. Although I think if she could see the stilted, rehearsed version of our relationship now, she'd say that was worse. At least when we were fighting, we were being real.

I pull myself up to sitting, being careful not to hit my head on the low ceiling, and swing my legs round to find the ladder.

I go into the office about twice a week, as Fiona says the rest of my work can be done at home. I have helped her with events before – I mean, I am the PA to the director of events – but in the past that has just meant ordering flowers or sending invitations that someone else has picked out. A lot of the time, the biggest help I seem to be to her is keeping the children entertained when she's on a business call.

She knows I want to work in the office and be a proper employee. She's made excuses over the years about my experience, and talked about me building my 'repertoire' (all the other staff seem to have come straight from fancy agencies), so I've

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waited patiently for my time to prove myself, and now this is it. Out of nowhere, Fiona let me organise the auction at the charity ball. The most important part of the event! I haven't mentioned it to her, but I know that if I get it right, she'll have to offer me a position within the company. You know, an actual I-have-a-desk-and-nobody-dare-use-my-prized-mug employee, taking part in the absurd office polls about who is the most outrageous person on *Love Island* and the correct way to make a cup of tea. Caitlyn, one of the junior event executives, left last month to work in Canada, so it's as if everything is lining up for me and finally my entire fantasy of what my London life should be is about to come true.

I flick the kettle on. Today I'm wearing my leopard-print dress, black court heels and my new hoop earrings. I can barely stand in heels, but there is no way I'm sauntering into the edgy east London office in flats. I already feel like an outcast every time I walk in.

I pour the boiling water into a mug over the dark coffee granules and pick up my phone as it vibrates in my hand. Three emails pop onto the screen. Two from Fiona and one from Rachel. Rachel and I used to text, and occasionally we still call, but she worked out that the quickest way to get a response from me was to send an email. She stopped picking up the phone months ago.

I mentally note the two emails from Fiona, a reminder of what time the taxi will be outside, and have I remembered to bring my laptop? (Yes.) I take a sip of coffee as I open the email from Rachel.

*Hi Katy,*

*Hope you're having a nice Monday.*

*I thought I'd email your work address to remind you to triple-check*

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*with HR that you can have the time off to come and house-sit next week. Bruno is very excited to see you, and I've attached a schedule with his meals and exercise regime. I'm sure you'll have lots you'll want to do when you're here, but I'll leave the fridge full and my Sky password is on the remote.*

*Good luck for your big event. Maybe I can see you before you go. I'll try and leave Paris a day early.*

*Love you,*

*Rachel x*

I drop the phone back to my side.

Urgh.

Six months ago, Rachel asked if I would house-sit for her and look after her giant, slobber-ridden dog/bear Bruno, while she spent a week at a work conference in Paris. I wanted to ask why her husband, Danny, couldn't return from the boat he's been on for the past ten bloody months to look after his dog, but I thought that wouldn't be very sisterly. (He's not a pirate; he just works on a cruise ship.)

Anyway, she asked me in the depths of a hangover when I didn't have the energy to make up an excuse, and she's been reminding me every other Monday since with a brisk email or novelty countdown tag on Instagram. I don't know why she's so excited; it's not like she's going to be there.

I take a sip of my coffee, squinting towards the house, where I notice William throwing his cereal across the table.

I wince as the coffee burns my tongue.

Obviously when I agreed to house-sit, I didn't know I was going to be organising the single most important event of my entire career the week before. In an ideal world, I wouldn't be going. It seems ridiculous to take a week off when I am finally

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on the cusp of a promotion. Really, I need to be in the office bright and early on Monday morning after the ball, ready to schmooze Fiona with light titbits and stories of how fabulous the evening was while everybody chips in with how much fun they had. Not being dragged around soggy Wales by a dog that always tries to hump my leg.

I did toy with the idea of cancelling. I even found a nice-looking doggy hotel that I thought Bruno might enjoy (with female dogs he could ‘socialise’ with), but quickly dismissed the idea when Rachel sent me a list of his favourite walks, with a sloppy picture attached of Bruno ‘smiling’ because he’s so excited about seeing me.

I begged Fiona to give me the time off (even though I haven’t had a holiday for the entire time I’ve worked here), and she agreed on the condition that I took my laptop with me so I could work remotely ‘if required’. I didn’t ask whether this included some awful virtual babysitting.

So I replied to every one of Rachel’s incessant emails about my stay, assuring her that *yes* I was definitely coming, *no* I didn’t still own a pair of walking boots, and *no*, I one hundred per cent did not want to buy a pair, especially that hideous pair that were fifty per cent off in the sale.

I down the final dregs of my coffee and check the time. Right, one hour before we have to leave.

Rachel doesn’t know my real work situation. It wasn’t a complete lie. I told her I work at Hayes Events (which is true) as PA to the director (also true). She knows I live in a flat in west London (almost true) and I live by myself (true!).

But she doesn’t know that I live in my boss’s back garden, and I actually spend eighty per cent of my working week looking

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after her children and sometimes feel like I was hired as an accidental nanny who just happened to apply for a job as the annexe was finished.

There would be no point telling her any of this. She already doesn't understand why I wanted to move away from our precious childhood village to live in London. She's never wanted to understand. So I leave her to it, with her perfect marriage and her perfect little life in our family cottage. We normally see each other once a year, at Christmas, and send the routine birthday cards and Lush vouchers, and that's fine. Neither of us asks for anything more.

I mean, sure, perhaps there have been times when I've exaggerated the glossiness of my life in answer to her asking an innocent question like 'How is your job going?' But what am I supposed to do? Tell her the truth?

But yes, even I can see that telling her that I hosted an after party in my rooftop garden with everybody from *Heat* magazine was a bit extreme. And that Kem from *Love Island* was there. And that I may have got off with him.

But I did say 'may'! I was very clear on that.

My phone buzzes in my hand and a second email from Rachel pops onto my screen.

*PS I'm having a piece of bara brith for breakfast for Grandma. Hope you're okay today x*

My heart squeezes as Grandma's warm, doughy hands fill my mind, pulling another bara brith from the oven and laughing as Mum exclaimed how we'd only just finished the last one. 'You can never have too much cake!' she'd say, giving Rachel and me a wink as we grinned over our cereal. If we did well in school or helped her around the house, cake for breakfast was our treat.



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Bara brith was her favourite. The heavy fruit loaf was a constant staple of our kitchen, sitting right next to the kettle. None of our friends from school liked it, but Rachel and I couldn't get enough.

My eyes sting at the memory. How has it been two years since she died?

I drop my phone onto the sofa and pluck a fondant fancy from the cupboard, shoving the entire thing in my mouth before I start crying.

I can't start the day in tears.

I catch sight of myself in the mirror and give myself a goofy grin. I wince as I notice my large teeth, and the bags that threaten to swallow my eyes. I pull a more serious face, with a small, subtle smile. The kind of face I need to fit in with Fiona's dreadful cool employees.

Except every time I pull that face, I look like I'm trying to hide the fact that I'm the person who's just farted.

I relax my face and pad into the bathroom. As I shut the door and switch the shower on, I continue to practise my face of indifference.