



PAGEs & CO



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Police replied, "We have been looking for you for some time."

'not,' Alice said, 'it stays the same year.'

'It's a very poor sort of memory, Alice,' the Hatter remarked, 'that can't repeat what it has just been told you! I wonder if I've ever heard it through?'
'I don't quite understand you,' she said.

'The Dormouse is asleep,' said, as politely as he could, the Hatter. 'The Dormouse shook its head impatiently without opening its eyes, 'Of course, of course,' said the Hatter again. 'You guessed the riddle yet?' the Hatter said again.

'No, I give it up,' Alice said, very faintly, turning to Alice as she lay on the grass.

"Indeed I was," said the Hatter, as I do,' said the Hatter, it. It's him.' I don't course you do."

"Indeed I was," said Anne comfortably. "It wasn't so hard as you might imagine, either. I sit with Diana. Our seat is right by the window and we can look down to the Lake of Shining Waters. There are a lot of nice girls in school and we had scrumptious fun playing at dinnertime. It's so nice to have a lot of little girls to play with. But of course I like Diana best and always will. I adore Diana. I'm dreadfully far behind the others. They're all in the fifth book and I'm only in the fourth. I feel that it's kind of disgrace. But there's not such an im-



'It is the same thing with you,' said the Queen, dropping her voice. 'I have thought over all she could remember about it, which wasn't much. The Hatter was the first to speak. 'What day of the month is it?' he said, taking his watch out of his pocket, and was shaking it every now and then, and holding it up to the light, and then said 'The fourth.'

"Two days wrong!" sighed the Hare.
"The works!" he added looking angrily at the March Hare meekly replied.

'Yes, but some crumbs must have got in as we were eating,' said the March Hare. 'I don't like tea with crumbs in it,' said Alice; 'but then I don't like tea without anything in it.' 'It's the same thing,' the Hatter said, 'to me.'

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time and thinking odd things and could not herself remember when she had not been thinking and could not herself remember what she was thinking at the moment she belonged to. She felt as if she had grown-up passing silently from Crewe, the voyage she had a long time ago, and to some Iro on it; she was thinking of the big talk to them and young officers' children playing through the middle of one time Prince of Wales, and then in the things she who used to be so puzzling streets where the ocean one mysterious little she moved the day was as Captain Crewe, "Wh-

Once on a dark winter's day, when the yellow fog hung so thick in the streets of London that the lamps were lighted and the signs blazed with gas as they do at night, an odd-looking little girl stood with her father, and was driven rather slowly through the big streets. She sat with her head tucked under her, and leaned against her father's shoulder, as she stared out of the window at the passing world. She held her heart in her hands, and looked out with a quiet, unashamed thoughtfulness in her big eyes. She was a little girl that one did not expect to see, and would have been an old look for a child of seven. The fact was, however, that she had seen many odd things and could not herself remember them all. Thinking things about grown-up people made her feel as if she had lived a long, long time. At this moment she was thinking of the big ship, of the Lascars who had been on the voyage she had just made from Bombay with her father, and of the children playing about on the hot deck. She was thinking of the young officers' wives who used to try to make her talk about the things she said. Principally, she was thinking of what had happened to her when she had been in India, that at one time one was in India in the blazing sun, and the other was in the ocean, and then driving in a strange vehicle through the streets of Calcutta, where the day was as dark as the night. She found that

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TILLY AND THE
BOOKWANDERERS



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Illustrated by Paola Escobar



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*For my sister Hester, who is made
of the same stories as me*



THE VIEW FROM THE GATE OF A FAIRGROUND

Matilda Pages pushed open the door of Pages & Co. and breathed in deeply, taking in the familiar scent of just-blown-out candles, dark chocolate and, of course, books. For a second she forgot that she was splattered with muddy water and simply relished the week's holiday that stretched out in front of her like the view from the gate of a fairground. But the bubble of calm popped as the damp seeped through her tights, making her shiver, and she marched through the door connecting the bookshop to the narrow house she lived in with her grandparents. She let the door crash behind her, tossed her school bag on the table – accidentally sending a pile of potatoes

flying – and flopped dramatically into a chair.

She paused, waiting for her grandmother to react, and when Grandma finally turned, Tilly flung her head theatrically on to her arms on the table.

'Happy half-term, Tilly,' Grandma said, looking around in confusion. 'What on earth is the matter? And why are you taking it out on the potatoes?'

Tilly blushed and sheepishly started picking them up.

'And you're soaking – it's not still raining, is it?' Grandma said, peering out of the kitchen window. She gave her granddaughter's head an affectionate rub as Tilly kneeled to rescue a stray potato that had rolled into the cat basket. Tilly sighed and leaned against Grandma's legs.

'Grace went through a puddle on her bike and it splashed all over me.'

'Surely she didn't do it on purpose?' Grandma asked gently.

Tilly harrumphed in disagreement.

'Aren't you two as thick as thieves?' Grandma said.

The View From the Gate of a Fairground

'That was before, when we were just little. She has new friends now,' Tilly said. 'She got on to the netball team, and only wants to be with those girls now. She sits with Ammara and Poppy every day.'

'Have I met Ammara and Poppy?' Grandma asked.

'No, they went to St Enid's, and they stick together all the time.'

'Well, why don't you invite some of them round during the holiday?' Grandma suggested. 'Get to know each other?'

'I don't think they'd come,' Tilly said uncertainly. 'They're always whispering and giggling about something when I try to talk to them.'

'They might surprise you. You don't know if you don't ask,' Grandma said. 'Be brave, Matilda. Be brave, be—'

'Be brave, be curious, be kind,' Tilly interrupted.
'I know.'

'It's what we always used to tell your mum growing up,' Grandma said.

'I just think being brave comes more naturally to

some people than others,' Tilly said.

'Often it's the things that don't come naturally to us that are the most important,' Grandma said. 'Now, why don't you take off that wet uniform and have a shower? I'll make you a hot chocolate to celebrate the start of the holidays.'



Twenty minutes later Tilly was clean and dry, wearing her own clothes, and carrying two mugs of hot chocolate covered in whipped cream, one for her and one for her grandad. She pushed the kitchen door open with her back and reversed into the bookshop. Pages & Co. was Tilly's favourite place in the world. From outside, on the busy north London high street, it looked like an entirely normal bookshop, but once inside it didn't quite make sense how everything fitted inside its ordinary walls.

The shop was made up of five floors of corners and cubbyholes, sofas and squashy armchairs, and a labyrinth of bookshelves heading off in different

The View From the Gate of a Fairground

directions. A spiral staircase danced up one wall, and painted wooden ladders stretched up into difficult-to-reach corners. Tall arched windows made it feel a little like a church when the light spilled in and dust motes danced in the air. When it was good weather the sun pooled on the floor and the bookshop cat – named *Alice* for her curious nature – could often be found dozing in the warmest spots.

During the summer the big fireplace behind the till was filled to bursting with fresh flowers, but as it was October a fire was roaring there.



Tilly had never been very far outside London, but she felt like a seasoned traveller within the pages of books: she had raced across the rooftops of Paris, learned to ride a broomstick and seen the Northern Lights from the deck of a ship. She had explored wonderlands and secret gardens with girls curious and contrary. She found books that led to long debates with Grandad over crumpets dripping with butter, and discovered stories that she read again and again until



they shone far more brightly than the endless tests at school. She found friendships that seemed free of the complicated social rules at school. Tilly sometimes felt like there had been a lesson where friendship had been explained, but she'd been off poorly and had never quite been able to catch up.

Grandad was behind the till, sorting through books that customers had ordered, matching receipts to titles and stacking them neatly, ready for collection. Tilly deposited the second mug of hot chocolate on the till, managing to avoid spilling most of it.

'Happy holidays, Tilly!' he said, clinking mugs with her. Grandad drank deeply and pretended, as he always did, that he didn't know he had whipped cream on his top lip. 'Got much homework?'

'I have to read a book I've never read before,' Tilly said, straight-faced.

'Goodness, sweetheart,' Grandad said with a grin. 'You'd better crack on with that immediately, if you even have a hope of finishing in a week.'

Tilly giggled as she stuck a finger in her whipped

cream, thinking of the pile of five books she had stacked next to her bed for her holiday reading.

'Ms Webber did say that after the holidays we'd be starting a project about our favourite characters from books, and that if we wanted to get a head start on that we should think about who ours were. Who would you pick?'

'What a question,' Grandad said, licking the cream from his lip. 'I must admit my gut instinct is pulling me towards Sherlock Holmes, but I'll have to have a proper think and get back to you with my official answer. Now, other than your particularly arduous workload, what else do you have planned for the week? Is Grace coming over?'

'I don't know why you and Grandma keep asking me about Grace,' Tilly said.

'Do we?' Grandad said, surprised. 'Well, I thought she was your best friend?'

'I don't have a best friend,' Tilly said firmly. 'I've realised there isn't anyone who's best-friend material at school.'

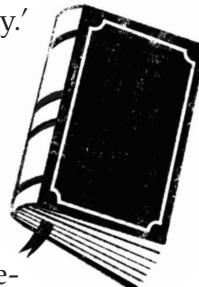
'And what exactly makes someone best-friend material?' Grandad asked.

'Someone who sticks by you; someone who never gets bored of talking to you. Someone who's adventurous, and clever, and brave, and funny . . .' Tilly said, checking her criteria off on her fingers. 'Someone like Anne Shirley or Alice from Wonderland – those are *my* favourite characters, incidentally.'

With very few exceptions Tilly found that she much preferred the company of characters in her books to most of the people she knew in real life.

'I'm not sure best friends are a one-size-fits-all sort of situation, Tilly,' Grandad said carefully. 'Sometimes a person who becomes a friend is the least likely person you'd expect. Friends should bring out the best in you, not be the same as you. I'm sure you're someone's perfect fit.'

Tilly tried to imagine herself as the perfect fit for a potential best friend. But when she thought about herself too directly she felt sort of fuzzy round the



Tilly and the Bookwanderers

edges, like a photograph that was blurred, and when she compared herself to the characters she met in books their ink and paper felt more real than her bones and skin.

'And, for now, you've always got me,' Grandad continued. 'If you're in the market for an elderly best friend with whiskers and a bookshop.'

'Exactly,' Tilly said, trying to erase all thoughts of hypothetical best friends from her mind. 'I don't need anyone who doesn't live in Pages & Co.'

NO ONE HAS PROPER ADVENTURES IN REAL LIFE

The next morning Tilly woke up to the sound of rain and falling autumn leaves on her sloped skylight window. Rain meant quiet days in the shop as people stayed inside with only the odd group of bedraggled readers drying out in the café area, waiting for gaps in the downpour. She relished the school holidays with the familiar rhythms and rituals of the bookshop, and she savoured every moment of her first-day-of-the-holidays routine: a chapter of a new book in bed while everything was quiet, getting dressed in anything that wasn't school uniform, a lazy breakfast of one of Grandad's perfectly boiled eggs with toast soldiers.

'So, what's the plan for today?' Grandma asked, handing Tilly a mug of milky tea.

'Reading, mainly,' Tilly said.

'Do you want to wander down to the woods with me later?' Grandad suggested. 'Or I need to pop into the florist's and confirm all the flowers for the Wonderland party on Wednesday night – I could do with your eye for colour. We've created a monster with this party, I sometimes think. Every year the customers and publishing folk seem to expect a more extravagant theme.'

Tilly shrugged.

'Do you ever wish,' she said, ignoring Grandad's question and turning to her grandparents with a serious look on her face, 'that you had a relatively good friend in mortal peril that you could go and rescue?'

'I can't say that's something I spend much time thinking about,' Grandma said, exchanging a look with Grandad across the table.

Tilly sighed. 'I just wish there was something more

No One Has Proper Adventures in Real Life

exciting to do than go to the florist's,' she said. 'No one has *proper* adventures in real life.'

'If I didn't want to get myself into hot water, I would say that someone who can't find adventure in the woods is lacking in imagination,' Grandad said.

'You know what I mean.'

'I do, my dear, but it never hurts to keep a weather eye open for adventures, even small ones.'

'But for now,' Grandma said, 'why don't you stick with an adventure in a book and, if the rain ever stops, we can head out for a wander later.'



Tilly opened the door into the bookshop and went to find Jack, who looked after the snug café area that took up a corner of the ground floor. When she reached the mismatched collection of chairs and tables he was nowhere to be found, so she went to see if there were any cakes she could sample, but, just as she reached out for a gooey-looking chocolate brownie, Jack's head popped over the counter.

'Aha! Caught red-handed!' he said.

'I was just looking,' Tilly said sheepishly, before registering the wide smile on his face. 'Why do you have honey on your forehead?' she asked.

'I'm experimenting with pop cakes,' he said, holding up an ice-cube tray filled with sticky honey. 'Remember in The Faraway Tree books by Enid Blyton? They eat those cakes that explode with honey when you bite into them? I'm going to freeze the honey so I can bake it in the middle of cupcakes. At least that's the plan – the honey is proving a little, well, uncooperative.'

Jack, who was nineteen and saving up to go to pastry school in Paris, took his role as a bookshop baker very seriously and was always trying to recreate cakes and bakes from books. Tilly was under strict instructions to tell him whenever she came across a particularly tasty-sounding dish in a book she was reading. She had a suspicion he was using some of the new cookbooks for inspiration as well, as every once in a while she'd had to wipe off a smear of icing

from a spine sticking out from a shelf, as though it had been put back in a hurry.

'Do you want some hot chocolate?' Jack offered as he manhandled the ice-cube tray into the tiny freezer section of the café fridge. 'I'll bring it up.'

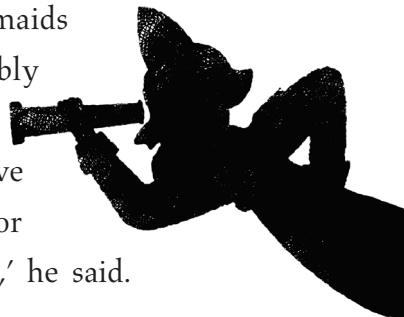
Tilly nodded and grinned and then headed to her favourite reading corner on the first floor. Ten minutes later Jack sat down next to her, carefully holding a tray with two steaming mugs – and two brownies – on it. 'If your grandparents notice me giving you brownies so soon after breakfast, just claim it's a very important baking experiment for the party, okay?'

He nudged her arm. 'What are you reading?'

Tilly showed him the book cover, which was blue and glittery.

'I've just started. It's about mermaids and pirates and the ocean. It's probably not your kind of thing.'

'Well, actually, Miss Tilly, I'll have you know I have quite a penchant for books about pirates and the ocean,' he said.



'But I like all sorts, really. I can't resist books set in space, especially if they've got something weird going on, or a really good twist. And, if there's some kind of intelligent robot, even better. Especially if it turns out to be evil. I know I should know this by now, but what are your favourites?'

'My two favourite books are *Anne of Green Gables* and *Alice in Wonderland*,' Tilly replied with a great deal of certainty. 'Anne and Alice are my favourite characters.'

'Why do you like them so much then?'

She paused. 'For lots of reasons, but I like them best because they seem real even when I'm not reading about them.'

'What do you mean by real?' Jack asked.

Tilly contemplated the question.

'Like, sometimes when I don't know what to do I think about what Anne would do, or I find myself wanting to tell Alice about something I learned, and it takes a second before I remember they're not real people I can just go and talk to.'

Jack smiled. ‘Often characters in books are considerably more consistent than the people around us. All that messy life stuff does rather get in the way. Speaking of,’ he said, brushing crumbs off his apron as a tinny beep sounded through the shop, ‘my pop cakes are calling. Come and try one in a bit.’

He pushed himself up from the squishy sofa and disappeared down the stairs, leaving Tilly to her book.



A little while later Tilly was interrupted from her adventures under the sea by the sound of her grandma’s laughter tumbling down the stairs. Tilly couldn’t remember the last time she’d heard Grandma laugh like that, or the last time she herself had laughed so hard either, so she tiptoed up the stairs to see what was causing it. She found Grandma tucked in a corner, wiping tears from her eyes as a woman with dark curly hair pinned up on the back of her head waved her hands around animatedly. She seemed quite a lot younger than Grandma and wore

a long, old-fashioned-looking dress. Tilly crept closer, wanting to hear what Grandma was finding so funny, without interrupting the moment.

‘And do you know, he turned to him and said in the most insufferable voice, “She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me.” I tell you, Elsie, I held Charlotte’s hand very tightly to stop myself going over and telling him exactly what I thought of his manners, especially when he was so new to town. Of course, my mother will forgive a man that rich almost anything, although this tested even her resolve.’

No longer able to resist Grandma’s giggles, Tilly coughed loudly and rounded the corner only to find Grandma sitting by herself.

‘Oh, Tilly!’ she said, still hiccuping a little. ‘Are you okay, darling?’

‘Where’s that woman gone?’ Tilly asked, looking around in confusion, unable to understand how she’d left so *quickly* and *quietly*.

Grandma's laughter abruptly stopped. 'Which woman, darling?' she asked, sitting up straighter.

'The woman you were just talking to, of course,' Tilly said. 'The one with the long dress and the dark hair – the one who made you laugh like that!'

'Oh, her,' Grandma said slowly. 'That's Lizzy – she's an old friend. You caught a glimpse of her, did you?'

'She was literally just sitting here as I came up the stairs,' Tilly said, confused. 'Where's she gone?'

'She must have slipped past without you noticing. You know how this place is like a rabbit warren; it's impossible to keep track of everything and everyone. I'm forever losing you in here!' Grandma said, more composed. 'Anyway! Enough of that! How's your book?'

Tilly had the distinct feeling that Grandma wasn't telling her something.

'How long have you known Lizzy for?' she asked, ignoring Grandma's question.

'Oh, a long time now.'

'She's not very old, though?' Tilly persisted.

'No, I suppose she's not. But she's an old soul.' Grandma smiled. 'She's . . . well, Tilly, if I tell you the truth, part of the reason I enjoy spending time with her is that she reminds me of your mum, very much.'

'Mum?' Tilly sat down on the now-empty chair opposite Grandma, hungry for details and feeling her heart punch against her ribcage. 'What reminds you of her? She doesn't really look like her, does she?'

'No, not particularly,' Grandma said. 'It's more how she holds herself, her sense of humour, her way of telling stories. Your mum used to make me laugh in the same way Lizzy does.'

'Did my mum know her too? Were they friends? How old is Lizzy?' Tilly asked.

'Ah, a little older than she looks,' Grandma said. 'I first met Lizzy years before your mum left. I need to get her skincare secret, hey?'

Tilly was feeling light-headed with this new information about her mother, who she'd only known as a baby. Beatrice Pages had left when Tilly

was tiny, and Tilly had grown used to not speaking about her to avoid reopening old wounds that seemed to haunt Grandma and Grandad. Sometimes she lost her grandad for days at a time if she asked questions; he was physically there, but barely seemed to notice anything going on around him, ignoring customers and Tilly alike. So when these precious gems of information emerged Tilly gathered them to her and guarded them fiercely.

'Anyway, that's enough chat about old friends,' Grandma said, bringing the conversation to a close with a firm nod of her head. 'Do you have a moment to come and help me in the stockroom?'

Tilly nodded, and Grandma took her hand as they walked down the stairs together, where they were immediately pounced on by a panicked-looking Jack.

'I need help!' he wailed.

'What's wrong?' Grandma asked as Tilly imagined an array of horrible accidents involving honey, or knives, or both.

'I can't find the vanilla essence!' Jack shouted,

making two people sitting drinking coffee eye him warily and Alice the cat raise her head in disdain from the cushioned seat she had claimed for the morning.

Grandma sighed.

'That's all?' Tilly said. 'I thought you'd hurt yourself. I thought it was an emergency.'

Jack looked surprised.

'This *is* an emergency. I need to get the vanilla in the batter now. Do you have any in the kitchen, Elsie, or could you go and ask Mary, Tilly?'

Grandma took a deep breath. 'Tilly, you go and check the kitchen and see if you can find some in the pantry. I'm going to get back to the stock cupboard.'

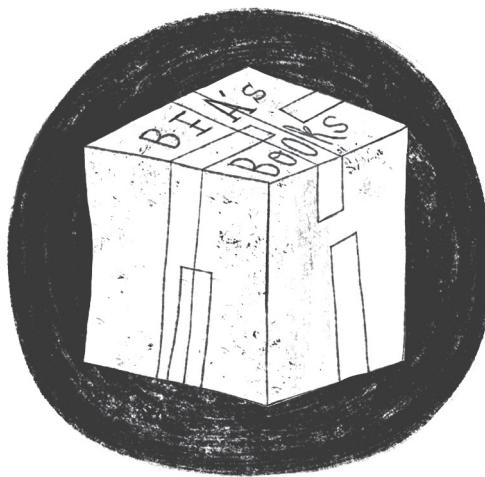
'Don't get honey on my book,' Tilly said sternly, putting it behind the counter before heading to the kitchen.

There was nothing in the pantry so Tilly rifled through the kitchen cupboards, but she couldn't find any vanilla essence there either. The cupboards seemed to be full of everything and nothing all at the same time, the result of her grandad's inability to throw

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anything away in case it proved useful later, however much it looked like junk to Tilly and Grandma. She found one orange sock, several pencils and the red half of a pack of cards, but no vanilla.

And then, tucked away behind a heap of empty shoeboxes, she found a dusty cardboard box wrapped in packing tape. On the top flap it had 'Bea's Books' written in black marker pen. Tilly felt her heart squeeze and a crackle of something she couldn't identify deep inside her: these were her mum's stories.



3

OTHER PEOPLE'S MEMORIES

Tilly dragged the box into the kitchen and peeled off the tape, which had turned crunchy with age. The noise of the bookshop melted away, and her hand drifted to the tiny gold bee necklace round her neck, a gift from her mother when Tilly was born, which matched the one Bea had worn herself.



Tilly's idea of her mum was stitched together from a patchwork of old photos and other people's memories. No one knew where Beatrice Pages had gone, and this lack of facts meant that the hole her mother had left had torn, ragged edges that were slow to knit back together.

Tilly had almost given up asking, but when she did,

conversations about Bea's disappearance always went the same way.

'Love, we've told you everything we know, and what the police think. It's not good to dwell on what happened,' one of her grandparents would say.

'But the police think she was unhappy and just left to start again somewhere. I don't understand why she would have done that just after I was born if she . . .' Tilly found it hard to voice the end of that thought.

The reassurances always came. 'Tilly, she loved you very, very much. We know that without any doubt at all.'

'I just don't understand why she would leave if she loved me so much.' Tilly couldn't help but come back to the same question she always asked, feeling the prick of tears as she spoke.

'We don't understand either, Tilly, my love. We wish we did,' Grandma would say, and Grandad, as always, would quietly wipe his eyes with his tartan handkerchief.

Tilly pulled her mind back to the box in front of her. Inside were piles of old books, the paper yellowing and the covers tattered and ripped. Tilly stared at them, not sure where to start, but as she went to pull out the top book she heard Jack calling from the shop.

'Tilly! Vanilla! I'm smearing honey on your book as I speak!'

The bubble popped and Tilly sighed and pushed the box to the side of the kitchen. She wanted to save it until she had uninterrupted time to look through it properly, the way she made sure she had time to savour a new book.

She went back through to Jack in the bookshop. 'I couldn't find any vanilla; you should ask Mary,' Tilly said.

'Well, go on then.' Jack gestured impatiently. 'Go and ask her.'

Tilly opened her mouth to make an excuse, wanting to return to the box of books. But the words weren't there, so she turned and grabbed an umbrella from by the door, but skidded on something squishy underfoot.

Other People's Memories

She looked down to see a half-eaten sandwich on the wooden floor. She tutted to herself as she picked it up.

'Honestly, who eats marmalade sandwiches?' she said to herself as she threw it in the bin outside the shop, and crossed the road to Crumbs, the café run by Mary Roux.

Mary and Jack had a long-standing, mostly affectionate rivalry that was almost entirely one-sided. Mary was always lending Jack things he was missing, and offering him baking tips.

The bell above the door jangled as Tilly went in. She didn't spot Mary straight away, but she noticed Oskar, Mary's son, sitting at a table at the back, eating toast. A moment later Mary's face appeared behind the counter. She was carrying a plate of cupcakes iced in pastel shades, which she handed to a couple with a happily gurgling baby.

Mary grinned when she saw Tilly and beckoned her over once the family had sat down.

'What can I help you with?' Mary asked. 'Has Jack been experimenting again?'

'He's trying to make pop cakes, like the ones in the Enid Blyton books,' Tilly explained, 'but he's run out of vanilla and he wondered if he could have a little bit of yours, if you can spare some?'

'Of course, of course,' Mary said. 'Sit down. Let me grab some from the kitchen. Do you want some lunch while you wait? You look a bit peaky.'

'I'm okay,' Tilly said. She looked up at Mary, testing how she felt about sharing the news about the box with her. 'I just found some of my mum's old stuff. It's put me in a bit of a funny mood, I guess. I don't have much that was hers.'

'Oh, love. I can see why that might have thrown you,' Mary said before planting a kiss on the top of Tilly's head. Her hand rested on Tilly's shoulder a little longer than it usually did and then Tilly felt a squeeze as Mary headed off towards the kitchen. 'Sit down. I'll be right back.'

As the door through to the kitchen swung shut Tilly looked at Oskar and tried to make eye contact. He didn't ever seem to be in Crumbs when Tilly was

Other People's Memories

there, and he'd gone to a different primary school, so although they shared some lessons now they'd never really spoken much.

She tried to wander over casually.

'Have you started your English homework yet?' she asked, and Oskar looked up.

'No?' Oskar said in surprise. 'It's literally the first day of the holidays. But we have to read a book by an author we've never read before, right?'

'Yep,' Tilly said happily. 'Best homework ever.'

'I was thinking . . . I might come and find something at Pages & Co. later. Maybe? If that was okay?' he asked.

Tilly beamed. 'That's a great idea. I can help you find something, if you want? What do you like to read?'

Oskar scuffed his feet together and looked down at the table.

'All sorts. I started reading the first Percy Jackson book in the summer holidays and I'm really enjoying it.'

'They're so good, right?' Tilly said. 'I could not

believe it when I found out who Nico's dad was.'

'Don't tell me!' Oskar said. 'I haven't got to that bit yet – I'm still on the first one. I read kind of slowly.'

'Oskar's dyslexic,' Mary said, coming up behind them, a small bottle in one hand and a brown envelope tucked under her arm. 'But he still loves reading, don't you, my love?'

'All right, Mum,' Oskar said, brushing his mum's hand off his head in embarrassment.

'Right, well, you should definitely come over to the shop for your homework book, though,' Tilly said.

'Yes, thank you, Tilly. That would be lovely. Why don't you pop round now, Oskar?' Mary said, smiling widely.

'All right, Mum, chill out, okay?' Oskar said. He turned to Tilly. 'I'll come round tomorrow?'

Tilly nodded.

'Oh, and here's the reason you came over,' Mary said, holding out a tiny bottle of vanilla essence. 'Could you let Jack know I don't need it back as long as I can try one of his pop cakes?' She grinned, before

putting the envelope down on the table between them and pushing it towards Tilly, who looked at her quizzically.

'When you told me about your mum's books it made me think of this,' she said slowly. 'I've had it for ages. I should have given it to you sooner but, well, when Bea left I tucked it away, and it just slipped my mind until you mentioned finding her things.'

Neither Tilly, Mary nor Oskar seemed sure what to say or do next, so Mary pulled the envelope back towards her, and slid out a slightly faded photograph that showed Bea and Mary as young women on a sofa in the shop. They sat at either end, with their socked feet touching in the middle, and both of them had books resting on top of their heavily pregnant bellies.

'I'm sorry I haven't taken better care of it, Tilly,' Mary said as she tried to rub away a smear from one corner of the picture. 'But it's yours now, if you want it. I know it's only one photo, but I thought you might like it anyway. I can tell you a bit more about it, if you like, but I understand if you'd rather look properly by

yourself first. I can picture that day perfectly. I haven't the foggiest what book I was reading, but your mum went on a real classics binge while she was pregnant, nostalgic for her own childhood, I suppose. That book is *A Little Princess*; she read it over and over. It was her favourite – although I'm sure you know that. You can come and ask me about the photo or your mum any time you like, you know.'

'Thank you,' Tilly said quietly, staring at the photo. That was the first time she'd heard *A Little Princess* was her mum's favourite book. Mary slid the picture back into the envelope and passed it to Tilly.

'Go on, get back to Jack, and make sure to bring me over a pop cake later.' Mary gave her a gentle push towards the door. 'And keep that envelope out of the rain.'



After dropping the vanilla off with Jack, Tilly went back into the kitchen to find Grandad sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall next to the box with his hanky out. Tilly slid down the wall next to him and

squeezed in under his arm, breathing in his familiar smell of cashmere jumpers and old paper.

'I'd forgotten where I'd put these,' he said, hugging Tilly close to him. 'They were some of your mum's books when she was your age. She'd been rereading a lot of them while she was pregnant with you.'

'These were her favourites?' Tilly prompted, eager for more details.

'Yes, well, her favourites when she was growing up. These were ones that meant a lot to her when she was around your age. The books we love when we're growing up shape us in a special way, Tilly. The characters in the books we read help us decide who we want to be.'

Grandad paused, and Tilly noticed he had a book in his hands, turning it round and round as he spoke.

'Ah. This one,' he said. 'I wasn't sure whether to show you. I mean . . . Well, just let me know what you think of it.' He gave a last glance at the book in his hand and passed it to Tilly. It was *A Little Princess* – a copy with a yellow cover. Tilly took Mary's photo out

of the envelope and showed it to Grandad.

'Where did you get this from?' he asked.

'Mary just gave it to me,' Tilly said. 'Look, she's reading this exact book!'

'You see, it was her favourite,' Grandad said. 'She enjoyed it when she was your age, but she really fell in love with it while she was at university. She took this copy with her and read it over and over again. She . . . Well, she found something new in it as an adult, I suppose. Have you read it?'

'Yes, a few times.'

'What did you think?' Grandad asked. 'Did you connect with any characters in particular?'

Tilly shrugged. 'I enjoyed it. It's not my favourite but I liked Sara a lot. I like how she tells stories when she feels sad, and to help her after her dad dies.'

Grandad smiled softly, as much to himself as to Tilly. 'Well, now you have your mum's copy to keep. And a photo of her reading it.'

He looked at the box of books. 'There might be some in there you haven't read before. Why don't you

take them up to your room and have a sort through?' He gave Tilly a squeeze and hauled himself up off the floor. 'Can't leave your grandma to deal with Jack by herself for too long,' he said and headed back into the bookshop.

Tilly put *A Little Princess* back in the box and staggered upstairs with it to her tiny room at the very top of the house. The walls were lined with bookshelves full of her own books, as well as ones she had temporarily borrowed from the shop, something she was not really supposed to do, but after she caught Grandma spilling tea on what turned out to be a shop book a blind eye was usually turned as long as they reappeared in pristine condition. Tilly put the box down in the middle of the floor and placed Mary's envelope on top. She sat down on her bed, curled her knees up underneath her, and stared at them as her feelings tangled round each other, twisting and knotting her up.

Finally she pulled the photo out again and laid it on her bed before slipping a narrow album off her

shelves. In the pages were a collection of photos her grandparents had let her collate that all featured her mum: as a child, with Grandma and Grandad, in the bookshop, even some in New York where she had gone to university. The photos looked back at Tilly, a puddle of memories that weren't hers.

Tilly felt like she was being wrapped in a heavy blanket that was comforting and suffocating at the same time. Her mum's face looked up at her from too many photos all at once. When Tilly tried to picture her mum in her mind she felt like she was trying to imagine what a character in a book looks like. You think they're standing right next to you, but as soon as you whirl round to look straight at them everything blurs and dissolves, and the harder you try to see them, the more flighty and unfocused they get until they barely resemble a real person at all.

She tried to calm her breathing down and tucked Mary's photo into the album, before putting it on her bedside table. Then she took a deep breath and settled

down to look at the box of books instead, which felt more manageable.

'Books are my thing,' she muttered to herself. 'I can do books.'

She tried to blow the dust off the top of the box, but it worked rather less well than it did in films, so she wiped it with her sleeve. There wasn't any other writing on the box apart from her mum's name in blocky capitals. Tilly peeled back the rest of the barely sticky tape and pulled out the copy of *A Little Princess*. Underneath that was a dated-looking version of *Anne of Green Gables*, which she picked up, but found herself just gazing at the cover, unable to open it. The top front corner was ripped off and she could see '**Beatrice Pages**' written on the first page in a child's handwriting.

Tilly traced the lines of her mother's writing with a fingertip, trying to picture her mum at her age carefully inking a little bit of herself on to the paper. Tilly felt as though there was a delicate thread stretched between her and her mother that she had

only realised was there when this book had tugged on it. Grandad had always told her to write her name in her books, so it shouldn't have come as a surprise that her mum did the same thing when she was little.

'It's about creating a record of who's read and loved each book,' he would say. Grandad was always hunting in charity shops for copies that had someone's name in, or messages from people who had given books as presents. 'I love thinking about other people reading the books I love, or why someone gave that book as a present – those names and messages are like tiny moments of time travel linking readers from different eras and families and even countries.'

Tilly wondered why her mother had cared for these books, for they were clearly very well loved. Tilly wanted to know if her mother had loved these characters for the same reasons she did. Had Anne Shirley made her mum laugh in the same places? She closed her eyes and imagined a parallel life where she could ask her, where she could go downstairs and find her at the kitchen table, chopping salad leaves with

Grandad, or rubbing flour and butter together to make crumble topping with Grandma. Their house was always full of laughter and music and conversation, but Tilly could hear the silence where her mother should be, like an orchestra without a cello section.

She was pulled from her imagination by a gentle knock on the door, and Grandma popped her head round.

'Hi, sweetheart, how are you getting on? Grandad said you'd found a box of your mum's books?'

Tilly nodded as Grandma stepped into the room and picked up the copy of *A Little Princess*. She held it to her chest like it contained a small part of her daughter in its pages. 'I'm going to start thinking about dinner soon,' she said, still hugging the book tightly. 'Do you want to come down and help close the shop up beforehand? It's a bit chilly up here.'

Tilly nodded and followed Grandma downstairs. And, even though she knew the kitchen would be empty, she couldn't help but picture opening the door to her mother. But as she went in and felt the warmth

of the room envelope her she rooted herself once again in the present.

Later that evening, over a meal of chicken roasted with garlic and lemons and rosemary, with crusty bread and green beans, Tilly felt the hard gem of her sadness thaw a little, leaving questions as it melted.

'Do you know what sort of books my dad liked?' she asked, and Grandad seemed to choke a little on a mouthful of bread.

'I'm afraid not,' Grandma said as she patted Grandad on the back. 'We didn't really know him very well at all.'

'Do you think my mum would have known his favourite books?' Tilly asked.

'I'm sure she did,' Grandma said. 'I'm sure they talked about books along with everything else you talk to the person you love about.'

'Why don't we have any photos of him?'

'Well, for the same reason that we don't know what his favourite books were: we just didn't get to spend any time with him before he died.'

Other People's Memories

'Do you think Mum left because my dad died?'

'Oh, my love,' Grandma said. 'I don't know is the honest answer. I'm not going to pretend to you that it didn't break her heart not being able to be with your father for longer, or that she didn't spend a lot of time thinking about how things might have worked out differently. But then she had you, and she had a little bit of him back again, and that's part of the reason you were so precious to her.'

'I wonder which bits of me are from him?' Tilly said.

Grandad smiled. 'Well, you didn't get your hair or your height from us. Although I have a sneaking suspicion that you might have inherited your literary tastes from our side of the family.'

'But Tilly,' Grandma said, 'you may have a bit of him and a bit of her and a bit of us all mixed in there, but the best bits of you are all your own, that much I know. Now. Whose turn is it to do the washing-up?'



When Tilly had been small she had read with Grandad every night before she went to bed. Every evening after dinner, Tilly and Grandad would curl up on the big, squishy sofa in front of the fireplace and Grandad would read aloud a chapter or two of whichever book they were engrossed in. Together they had gone sailing with the Swallows and Amazons, met the witches of Miss Cackle's Academy, and visited worlds balanced on the backs of elephants.

As Tilly got older the tradition had gradually faded; first they started reading their own books next to each other, exploring vast and separate worlds while sitting side by side, and then Tilly had started taking her books up to bed to read and before she knew it, and without anyone making a particular decision about it, they didn't read together any more.

Later that evening, with her mum's copy of *Anne of Green Gables* still closed, Tilly crawled out of bed and crept back downstairs. Her grandma was reading with a cup of tea at the kitchen table and looked up

Other People's Memories

when Tilly came in. Seeing the book in Tilly's hand, she just smiled and went back to her own. Tilly pushed the door to the shop open and saw Grandad on the sofa, lit up by the flickering light of the fire. She crawled up beside him and put her mum's copy of the book on his knee. Without saying anything he put his arm round her, and when Grandma came through with three mugs of hot chocolate he

put his

own book

down

and began

to read.



4

SOMEWHERE ADVENTURES LIVE



The next morning Tilly was sitting at the kitchen table, reading her mum's copy of *Anne of Green Gables*, when Grandad popped his head round the bookshop door. He came and gave Grandma a kiss on the cheek as she simmered gooseberries on the stove, singing under her breath along with the radio.

'Oskar's here,' he said to Tilly, smiling. 'He said you'd promised to help him find a book.'

'Oh, I didn't think he'd come,' Tilly said, putting a bookmark carefully in her mum's book and placing it well out of reach of the sticky gooseberries. She headed into the shop and saw Oskar wandering between the bookshelves, trailing his fingertips along the spines of

the books. Tilly watched him soak up the atmosphere of the shop for a moment.

'Have you never been here before?' she asked, making Oskar jump a little.

'I didn't hear you come in,' he said sheepishly. 'And yes, of course I've been in before; it's where Mum gets all her Christmas presents. But I'd forgotten how . . .' He paused.

'Magical?' Tilly suggested. 'Exciting? Beautiful?'

'Yes, but that's not what I mean. It's not what it looks like, it's how it makes you feel, isn't it? Is there a word that means somewhere adventures live?'

'I don't think so, but there should be,' Tilly said.

'But anyway,' Oskar said, collecting himself, 'it's cool, is what I mean. But I haven't been in for ages. I'm not up this way that much. We have someone else who looks after the café at weekends, and I usually spend the school holidays with my dad.'

'Where does your dad live?'

'In Paris, with my big sister, Emilie.'

'Oh wow, I thought you were going to say south

London or something,' Tilly said. 'It must be amazing to get to spend the holidays there. I've never even been outside of England.'

'Yeah, I guess,' Oskar said. 'Paris is pretty cool, but Dad got remarried last summer and Marguerite's really nice, but now it kind of feels like I'm visiting someone else's home when I'm there. And Emilie is always out with her friends, so I decided not to go this holiday.'

'How come Emilie lives with your dad?' Tilly asked.

'She decided to go to college there,' Oskar explained. 'She wants to be fluent in French so she can get into university there too. Her boyfriend lives in Paris.'

'Do you miss them?' Tilly asked.

'Yeah, I guess. I don't know. I miss my sister more than my dad, I think. Sometimes it feels like I'm in the way when I'm there. Not that I'm not wanted, but that it would be easier if I weren't there.' Oskar paused. 'Do you miss your parents?' he asked quietly, as though he wasn't sure if he was allowed to talk about them.

'Mostly it's almost fine,' said Tilly, surprising herself at how comfortable she felt talking to Oskar honestly,

'but every so often I can feel the gap where they should be. It's not like that all the time, but I'm always aware of it a little bit.'

'What happened to them?' Oskar asked, still looking at his feet.

'My dad got ill and died. I don't know many of the details. He had to go abroad for work; he got ill; he died before he could get home. We don't really know what happened to my mum. She left really soon after I was born without telling Grandma and Grandad or anyone where she was going and she never came back. We haven't heard from her since.'

'Whoa, that's like something from a TV show,' Oskar said, before stopping. 'I'm sorry. I didn't mean . . . It must be horrible. Do you really not know anything?'

Tilly shrugged. 'She didn't leave a note or anything. The police think that maybe she had postnatal depression and she ran away and is living a completely new life somewhere else. They said she might try to make contact at some point, but that I shouldn't get my hopes up.'

'Do you think about your parents a lot?'

'Kind of. It's funny because I can't remember them at all, so it's hard to miss them or feel sad about them in a very specific way. It's like feeling sad that you never had a diamond ring, or a unicorn. I feel sad about the idea of them, and knowing that they're not here, and I hate that I don't understand why Mum left – but I don't really have any memories of them as real people. I have this, though.' Tilly pulled out her necklace from under her jumper and showed Oskar. The small gold bee was no bigger than the nail on Tilly's thumb.

'Was that your mum's?' Oskar asked.

'No, it's mine but she had one just the same. Hers was a present from my dad and when I was born she had one made for me too.' Tilly tucked it back into her jumper.

The shop phone suddenly started ringing and made them both jump.

'Anyway, I've never really told anyone else about all of that,' Tilly said a little awkwardly.

'I'm glad—' Oskar started, but Tilly cut him off.

'Let's find a book for English. I need a new one too.'

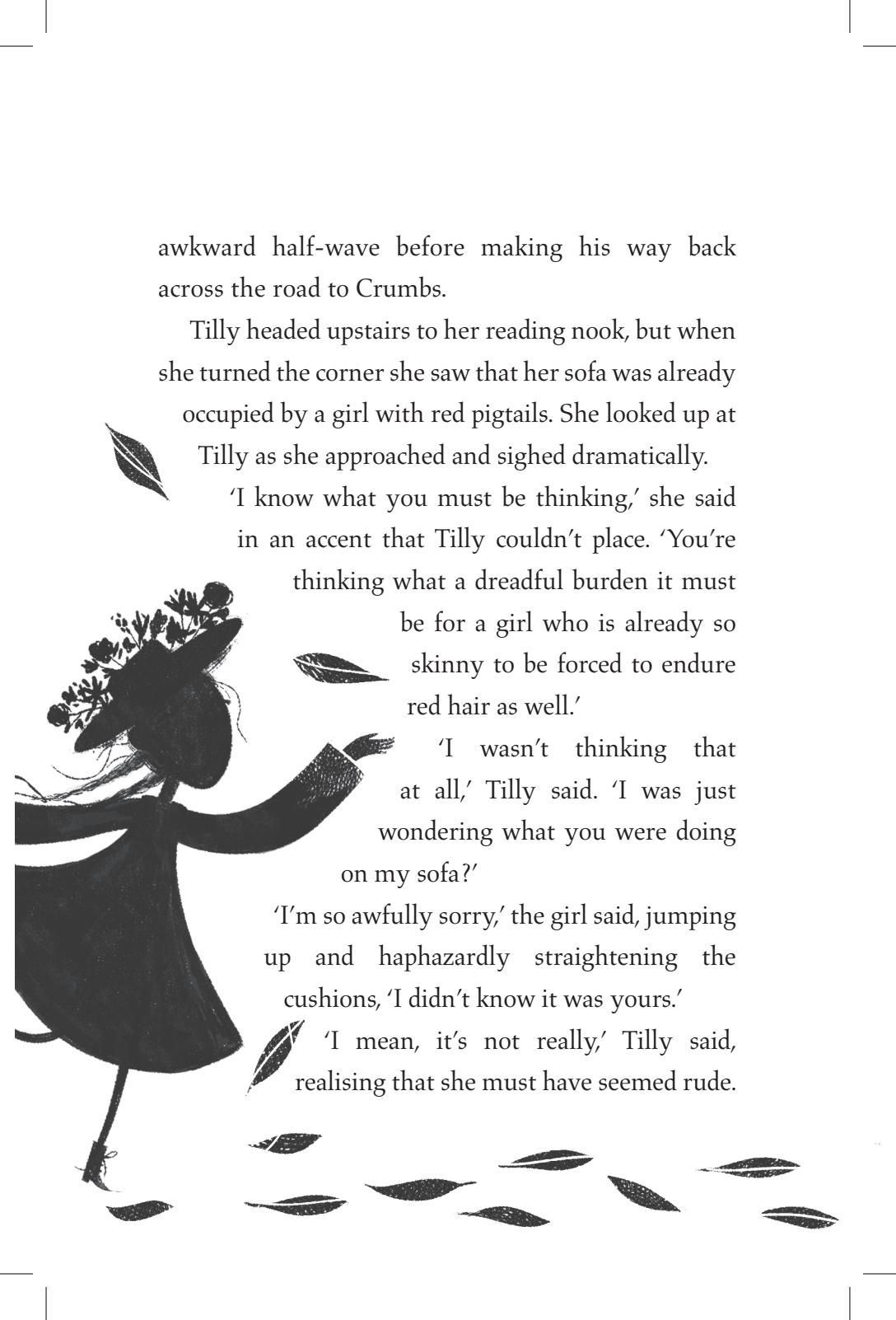
Oskar nodded and followed her up the stairs to the children's floor. Tilly picked out a pile of books for Oskar that she knew were printed on a different kind of paper that made it easier for people with dyslexia to read and placed them in front of him with a flourish.

While Oskar flicked through them, she went to find *A Little Princess* and realised the shop stocked several different editions. She looked through some of the different covers, wishing she'd had the chance to talk to her mum about the book. She was sliding the various editions back on to the shelf when, after careful consideration, Oskar settled on a slim book with a black cover and a creepy illustration on the front.

They took it downstairs where Grandad put it in a canvas tote bag stamped with the Pages & Co. logo, and refused to let Oskar pay for it.

'It's a pleasure to have you in Pages & Co.,' Grandad said. 'Special offer for friends of the shop.'

Oskar thanked Grandad and gave Tilly an



awkward half-wave before making his way back across the road to Crumbs.

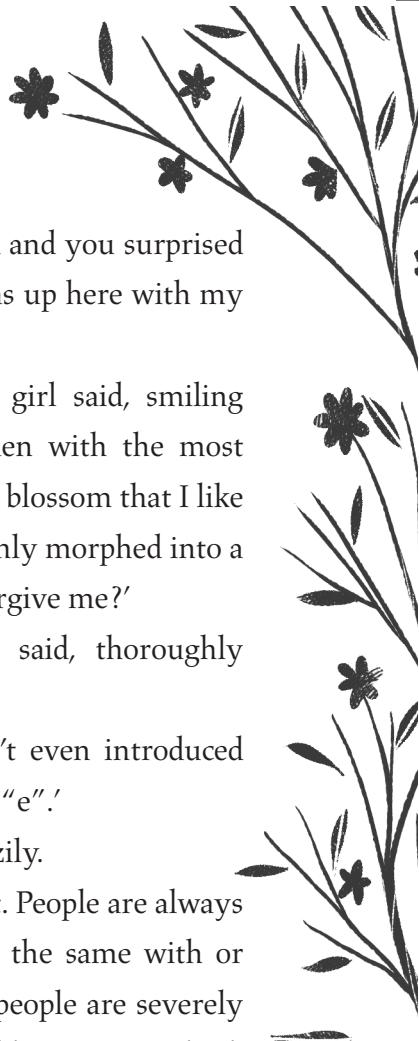
Tilly headed upstairs to her reading nook, but when she turned the corner she saw that her sofa was already occupied by a girl with red pigtails. She looked up at Tilly as she approached and sighed dramatically.

'I know what you must be thinking,' she said in an accent that Tilly couldn't place. 'You're thinking what a dreadful burden it must be for a girl who is already so skinny to be forced to endure red hair as well.'

'I wasn't thinking that at all,' Tilly said. 'I was just wondering what you were doing on my sofa?'

'I'm so awfully sorry,' the girl said, jumping up and haphazardly straightening the cushions, 'I didn't know it was yours.'

'I mean, it's not really,' Tilly said, realising that she must have seemed rude.



'It's just where I like to sit and read and you surprised me. I hadn't noticed you when I was up here with my fri— With a boy from school.'

'Oh, I know that feeling,' the girl said, smiling broadly. 'I have a tree that is laden with the most beautiful, sweet-smelling, pale pink blossom that I like to read under.' The girl's face suddenly morphed into a look of horror. 'But can you ever forgive me?'

'Forgive you for what?' Tilly said, thoroughly flummoxed at the change in tone.

'My horrible manners. I haven't even introduced myself. My name is Anne. With an "e".'

'With an "e"?' Tilly repeated hazily.

'Yes, the "e" is ever so important. People are always telling me that the name is much the same with or without the "e", but I think those people are severely lacking in imagination. How could you ever think that Ann without an "e" was the same as Anne with an "e"? It's like saying . . . Why, it's like saying that dessert is the same as desert! But there I go again with my terrible manners. I haven't even asked what your



name is. Oh, wait! Let me guess, you look like . . . an Emmeline, or maybe a Penelope. Or Cordelia?' she added, sounding hopeful.

'It's just Tilly, I'm afraid. Short for Matilda, Matilda Pages.'

'Why, that is a lovely name and I am quite envious,' Anne said, looking entirely delighted. 'I'm so thrilled to meet you.'

'Are you looking for a book?' Tilly asked.

'That sounds wonderful, thank you!' Anne said. 'Autumn *is* the most magical time of the year for reading, don't you think?' She gestured towards the window, which framed only drizzle and grey skies, but Anne reacted as though she could see auburn leaves tumbling in the wind. 'October is my absolute favourite month. And to read outside, with the sun dappling . . . Do you think dappling is a real word, Tilly? I think it must be, don't you? With the sun dappling the leaves of a tree, a glass of raspberry cordial at hand . . .' She tailed off, staring dreamily into nothing.

Tilly began to find the silence a little awkward, but

struggled to think of something to say and so returned to her fail-safe question. 'What's your favourite story?' she asked, jerking Anne out of her autumnal daydreams.

'Do stories you've made up yourself count?' asked Anne.

'I don't think so,' said Tilly. 'I think they have to be, well, proper stories, like in a book.'

'A story you've made up yourself is just as proper, don't you think? Although I suppose it is harder to share with other people unless it's written down. But I do love telling stories out loud as well. My friend Diana and I have a club where we read each other our stories and offer helpful advice on how to improve as writers. I must say, though, the advice is mainly one-way. Poor Diana, she doesn't have much of an imagination, although I love her fiercely regardless. I daresay it is good for my soul to be bosom buddies with a girl who is so lacking in imaginative powers.'

The mention of a friend named Diana made Tilly's brain itch; something about this girl was so familiar.

'But, anyway, it must depend on what the purpose

of your story is, I suppose,' Anne concluded, and looked up triumphantly.

Tilly nodded supportively, although she wasn't really very sure what Anne's point was.

'Do you know,' Tilly started, glancing down at the book in her hand, 'you do remind me of—' But she was interrupted by a harried-looking man who came up behind them and tapped Tilly on the shoulder imperiously.

'Excuse me, young lady, I need to pay for this immediately. Do you work here?' He was holding a very thick business textbook.

'Not really,' Tilly said, trying not to laugh as Anne impersonated the man's cross face behind his back. 'But I'll go and find my grandad. He owns the shop.'

The man nodded curtly.

'I'll be right back,' Tilly said to Anne.

'I don't trust you to come straight back, missy. I'll come with you; I have an incredibly important meeting to get to urgently,' the man said, and Tilly couldn't be bothered to explain that she wasn't talking to him.

She delivered him to Grandad who took him to the till, but when Tilly went back upstairs she couldn't see Anne anywhere. She ran down to find Grandad after the grumpy customer had gone.

'Ah, Tilly, just the person I was looking for. Don't forget, we need some of your inspiration for the Wonderland party later. I'd been wondering if we could possibly try to . . .' He paused, noticing how distracted she was. 'What's up, sweetheart?'

'Did you see a girl come past here a few moments ago?' she asked.

'No, afraid not, love. Was she a friend from school?'

'No, just a customer, I think. She seemed nice, though. I thought she might have stuck around for a bit,' Tilly said. 'But I can't find her.'

'She probably had to go and meet her parents, Tils,' Grandad said gently. 'Maybe she'll pop back in later. I'll keep an eye out for her if she comes in; what did she look like?'

'She had red hair in two plaits,' Tilly said. 'It was funny actually; she really reminded me of Anne Shirley'

from *Anne of Green Gables* – and her name was even Anne too! Such a weird coincidence. Maybe it's like owners and their dogs,' she joked. 'You start seeing your favourite characters in real people. Although that's not quite right with the dog thing, is it . . .?' She tailed off, noticing Grandad's face had gone pale. 'Are you okay? Should I get Grandma? Do you need a cup of tea?'

'No, no, I'm fine, love,' Grandad reassured her. 'Just a wobbly moment. Been on my feet for too long this morning, I think! I will take you up on that tea, though, and I'll just have a sit-down behind here for a moment – I'll be as right as rain before you know it.' The colour was already returning to his cheeks as Tilly left to make the tea.