

**THE  
YEAR  
THE  
MAPS  
CHANGED**

**DANIELLE  
BINKS**

LOTHIAN



# Prologue

Maps lie.

Or at least, they don't always tell the truth.

They're like us humans that way.

Mr Khouri would say it's because they can't show us everything about a place or the people in it. Maps don't tell you about the ownership, genealogy or history of an area. A map doesn't even really tell you where to begin or end – those ones with *Start Here* and *X Marks the Spot* are just that way in movies, or kids' menu colouring-in placemats. Really it's up to us – the people who live within the borders – to keep the truth and know the way.

And lately I've been thinking that it doesn't matter so much where you end up, if you can't remember how you got there in the first place. Like my pop would say: *It's not the destination, it's the journey.*

Remembering is like retracing my steps. There are so many different trails to this story and it's hard to know which one to take. But I need to lay down a way to see

everything that happened this year just gone: the war, Nora, Operation Safe Haven and the baby we couldn't keep.

I was eleven when everything started and twelve by the end. But that's another way that maps don't tell the whole truth – because it felt like the distance I travelled was a lot further than that.

# Memories like mountains

Arthurs Seat is the summit of this mountain range here. It's named that because it looks like someplace else – it's got nothing to do with King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, like I'd always hoped.

Last year we learnt that the Boon Wurrung people called the mountain Wonga and held corroborees lower down on the slopes called Wango – probably about where there's a car park now.

From the very top of Arthurs Seat you can see clear across the Mornington Peninsula, where we live, and over the whole bowl of Port Phillip Bay, from the tip of Point Nepean to the silver city of Melbourne winking in the distance. But if you want to go to Arthurs Seat and look at that view, you have to go on the chairlift too.

Luca first took me there when I was six, the year my mum died.

I was obsessed with great heights back then. I nearly gave everyone a heart attack one day when I crawled out of our neighbour Jed Trần's bedroom window and onto the

slanted shingle roof. I was too chicken to go to the edge like I thought I wanted to, so I ended up sitting somewhere between the gutter and the window, like a flung Frisbee, until Pop called Luca to come and get me.

After Luca roared up on his police bike, he went and got the Trâns' old ladder from the garage while Pop kept calling to me from down below, telling me to stay put.

I could hear Jed's mum, Vi, somewhere inside too. She was giving her son an earful for letting me climb out there, and for not having the good sense to come get her the second he saw what I was up to.

By the time Luca finally crawled out to me I was heaving my guts up with tears, but it wasn't because I was scared. It was hearing Jed's mother yell at him like that and remembering that mine never would again.

Well, Luca got me down and proved that fathers can yell at reckless children just as well as mothers can. Then he asked me what I'd been trying to achieve in the first place.

'I wanted to see her,' I said.

'See who, Freddo? Maria?' He shook his head. 'Your mama?'

I nodded.

'Heaven's *right there*,' and then I pointed at the sky, that big endless thing. 'I just wanted to see her again.' Because that was all anyone said to me in those days: she was in heaven now, safe and sound and looking down on me.

I still remember the feel of Luca's polyester police shirt, and how it ended up smelling like salt and his aftershave once I'd cried into it for what felt like a decade. He explained

a few things to me then, about heaven being more of an idea and less of a place, much less one you can climb to. But then he said trying to get a little closer to her wasn't such a bad idea. I'd just gone about it all the wrong way.

Luca took the rest of the day off. He told Pop that he was going to take me someplace special. 'Our own little corner of heaven.'

And then he did – the chairlift on the Arthurs Seat summit.

The metal double chairs had a little canopy like an umbrella up top. They'd swing you down this 950-metre long cable, starting 314 metres above sea level (numbers all written on warning signs at the ticket booth), with nothing for protection but a skinny metal bar across your lap as you went diagonally down the mountain.

And the view from up there . . . it's really something else. I remember thinking that I could touch the tops of trees with the soles of my shoes if I just swung my legs enough. And I remember knowing that my mum would have loved it up there with us.

Luca guessed what I was thinking. 'Your pop says Maria used to love riding on this when she was younger,' and then he kind of muttered, 'But probably not quite *this* young.'

It was true I was young for the ride. I think the lift operator had been a little nervous to let me on, but since Luca was still in uniform he'd sold us tickets and let us go anyway. I think Luca had been worried too, because he'd kept one of his big hands on the collar of my dress the whole way, and I could hear him gulping when my swinging legs made the chair sway.

I was no closer to heaven that day and I'm not so sure I even believe in it now – the place or the idea – but I felt closer to Mum. And every year since, when Luca and I made our annual trek to the summit, I felt like I got closer still. We'd talk about Mum while we were up there, just the two of us, in a way that we couldn't with our feet planted firmly on the ground.

At least, that's how it used to be.

I have decided that memories are a little like mountains. You need to hike to the top and get some height – what Mr Khouri calls *perspective* – so you can look down at how far you've come, and see all the people and choices that make up the map of your life.



## The greater the height

On the second last Tuesday of the school holidays in January 1999, we were snaking our way up the mountain: me, Luca, Anika and Sam. And even though I must've made that climb a dozen times, I still got a little green around the gills, as Pop liked to say, when we lurched around corners. My stomach would go one way while the car went the other.

At least now I was older I remembered to look straight ahead and not out the window as we went higher and higher up, because watching the drop always made my stomach lurch. Don't ask me why, but I felt safer in those metal chairs swinging down the mountain than in a car as it hugged the bends.

Sam didn't know not to look, and I didn't bother telling him. He was sitting behind Luca, who was driving, with his face practically kissing the window while both hands clutched the door handle. From where I sat behind Anika, I could see she was holding her handle the same way, knuckles popping.

'How are we all going?' Luca asked.

‘Good! Great! Are we nearly there?’ Anika did not sound excited.

She’s Luca’s girlfriend, but he doesn’t call her that. He’d say Anika was his ‘partner’, like they’re working on a school project together or riding around in his police car.

Sam is her son from her first marriage and he was ten when everything started – one year younger than me. He and Anika look like copies of each other. They have these dark-green eyes and pretty, long lashes, plus they both wear glasses. Only their hair is different – his is a short mop of dark-brown ringlets, and Anika’s is long and springy-curly.

I look like my mum too, or at least that’s what Pop reckons – and he’d know, since he was her dad. I’m tall for my age and lanky, with blue eyes and floppy, fair hair with a fringe. I even have light-brown freckles just like she did. Luca says they were like connect-the-dots on our noses.

We took another bend and I watched Luca reach over the centre console and give Anika’s leg a pat. He put his hand back on the wheel and said, ‘Just think about the view from the top – it’ll all be worth it, right Freddo?’

‘Right. So worth it.’ But my voice sounded dry and crumbling, like a first-try pancake. Luca caught me in the rear-view mirror and raised his eyebrows as though to say *play nice, be polite*.

Ever since Anika and Sam moved in with us two months ago, Luca has kept telling me to be on my best behaviour. He’d say I had to mind my manners and be extra polite and welcoming because we’re a family now. Which really didn’t sound like any family I’d ever been part of. It wasn’t

the way we used to be, when it was just Pop, Luca and me. And even though I can barely remember the time before I was three – which is how old I was when Mum and Luca married – I was also pretty sure it wasn't that way when it was just Pop, Mum and me either.

Anika tried to turn around and look at us kids, but her seatbelt locked so she could only look at Sam, who was still staring out the window. 'Are you getting excited, babe?'

He ignored her question. 'How high up are we?' he asked, his words fogging the window.

'You should ask Fred! Her class came here last year on an excursion, isn't that right, Freddo?' Anika tried to look at me, but I just saw the side of her face and one of her cheeks bulging in a smile.

I hated the way Anika tried all my nicknames on for size. She still hadn't settled on one yet, and part of me just wanted to tell her to call me Winifred, but Luca might think that was impolite.

I was named after my nan – Pop's wife – who I never met. Fred is Pop's nickname for me, Freddo is Luca's, and Winnie was Mum's. I once asked Pop why they couldn't stick to one name for me, and he said he didn't know, but maybe they all wanted to have little pieces of me, all to themselves. Lately I'd been wondering what piece Mum took with her when she died, and I'd been thinking about the Winnie I would have been if she hadn't. It was something I wanted to talk about with Luca, when we were 314 metres above sea level.

Sam pulled me out of my thoughts by repeating his

question. 'So, how high up are we?' He turned away from the window to frown at me. 'Do you even know?'

'I can't remember,' I muttered, and went back to looking at the safe scenery of granite ahead.

---

Last year, Mr Khouri had shown us a map of the area. It was full of lines and lines and lines wrapping around each other. He explained that it was a topographic map, and those lines were contours – a way to represent a three-dimensional surface on a flat piece of paper. He showed us how to read the lines to find valleys and hills, and how steep the slopes were; the smaller the circle, the greater the height. Around Arthurs Seat were all these tight circles and lines, and he asked our class what they reminded us of.

'Yes, Winifred?' Mr Khouri had said, like he couldn't believe how quickly I'd put up my hand.

'Like . . . fingerprints?'

'That's exactly right!' And then Mr Khouri smiled. Full-on, full-blown *beamed*. At me. 'That's correct, Winifred! Place is as much a part of your identity as your fingerprint or DNA. Little disturbances around where you live have these ripple effects that spread out and out and out into the lives of everyone, and everything around you.'

Mr Khouri was right about those disturbances. They started rippling one day, and then kept spreading – and lately I've been thinking that maybe they're still going, even now.

---

It was the kind of morning where the sky was the same colour as Port Phillip Bay; the whole world was blue on blue. And from the Arthurs Seat summit you could even see white sailboats bobbing in the water.

But as soon as we pulled into the car park, Anika jumped out and dashed to the toilets saying she thought she was going to be sick. Luca had followed her, then come back to stand with us kids by the stone wall of the lookout.

‘She’ll be right, just those bends took her by surprise,’ he said.

Sam was playing with one of the coin-operated standing binoculars, gripping both sides and making *rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat* and *brrrrrp!* sounds, like he was in a shoot-’em-up game at Timezone.

When Anika finally wandered over to us, her face was as white as those sailboats, her glasses were all fogged, and she’d tied her hair up into a messy bun.

‘Hey guys, I’m so sorry – that’s not a very fun way to start our day.’

Luca reached for her hand and squeezed it, and then they smiled at each other. Sam kept gunning boats behind us and I rolled my eyes – which of course Luca caught and frowned at me for.

‘I don’t think I’ve got it in me to do the chairlift either,’ Anika said.

Sam stopped gunning and turned around, frowning hard at his mum. ‘But you promised!’ he whined, and pushed his slipping glasses back up his nose.

I tried not to smirk.

‘I know, babe, and I’m sorry. But I’m just not up for it today.’

Sam opened his mouth, about to whine more, but Anika cut him off. ‘Let Fred and her dad do one trip together, then when they come back Luca will do another one with you, okay?’

I looked away when Anika said that. She cleared her throat and said quietly to Sam, ‘Let Luca and Fred have their time together first, okay?’

‘Well, wait a minute,’ Luca said, and held a hand up. ‘I’ve had plenty of goes on this thing – and this is Sam’s first time, so why don’t the two of you just ride together?’

Luca was looking at me when he said it, and I could see it all right there in his eyes – asking for one big happy family. *Play nice. Be polite.* I nodded my head and shrugged, then felt Luca’s hand land on my shoulder, squeezing as he said, ‘Good girl, Freddo.’

---

I showed Sam how to get onto the chairlift and lowered the thin metal safety bar across our laps. We waved to Anika and Luca as they watched us sail over the car park, and then we cleared the trees and took in the view of the whole peninsula – the dips and valleys, towns with houses like little boxes, and the long stretches of sand hugging the water. Our town was down there somewhere to the left of us too: Sorrento.

If you looked at a map of where we live, you’d see that the Mornington Peninsula is shaped like a fatter version of

Italy – a Blundstone boot instead of a fancy high heel – and instead of kicking Sicily, we're putting the boot into the Bellarine Peninsula. In class last year, we learnt that our town on the toe was called Sorrento, after the town Sorrento in Southern Italy (another place named because it looked like someplace else).

I pointed this out to Sam but I didn't know if he was really listening. After a while there wasn't much left to say.

The seats in front of us were all full and we kept passing couples to the right of us making their way back up the mountain. I turned around a little to see that behind us was full up too.

'Don't do that!' Sam yelled.

I sat back around and looked at him. 'Do what?'

'Make us move around. *Stop it!*'

I noticed his hands were gripping the steel bar in front of him, knuckles popping just like Anika's had been in the car on the way up.

'Are you okay?'

He closed his eyes. 'Just stop moving so much!'

I sat back and tried to be still, even with my legs hanging out and dangling a hundred metres in the air. I listened to Sam take shuddery, shaky breaths beside me and watched his knuckles turn whiter on the safety bar.

'Why do you and Luca do this every year anyway?' he asked.

I looked over and saw his eyes were still shut behind his round, red glasses frames, so I couldn't just shrug his question away. 'I was sad one day and he brought me here,

and it didn't make everything better but it was . . . okay.' I shook my head. 'So now he always takes me in the last weeks of the Christmas school holidays – just the two of us.'

I wondered if Sam could hear the hurt behind my words, but he didn't seem to.

'Kinda like how my dad takes me to his first game of cricket every year,' he said.

I'd met Sam's dad a few times in the last eight months since Anika and Luca became a couple. His name was Ian and he seemed nice enough, except he lived all the way on the other side of the city and didn't come down very often to see Sam. He hadn't even been to visit since Anika and Sam moved in with us, and now he was away over the holidays with his new wife. They'd sent Sam a present from Queensland, but it arrived two weeks after Christmas – one of those Super Soakers. Sam had seemed disappointed. I think he'd been expecting something different, or else just wanted his dad to be there to give it to him in person.

Our chair was coming to the end of the downward loop, speeding up a little as the cable wrapped around a steel pole and pulley at the bottom of the mountain. A few people in front of us were hopping off there, maybe to go and explore along one of the hiking trails, but most people were like us, staying on and making their way back up.

Sam opened his eyes when we got to the bottom, and one of the chairlift attendants nodded at us when I didn't make a move to lift the safety bar and get off.

Instead our chair started making the climb back up, and that's when Sam said, 'You're lucky that Luca does



this with you.' He took a shaky little breath. This part was scarier: climbing higher and higher up with your back to the plummeting view.

Sam kept talking, even as he closed his eyes again. 'I mean, it's not like Luca *has* to do this kinda stuff, since he's not . . .'

He didn't finish but he didn't need to. When Anika and Luca started dating, the dad thing was one of the first that Sam asked me about. Or rather, told me about.

'Luca's not your dad, obviously,' he'd said one evening when the parents had lumped us together after dinner. Like sticking us in the lounge room with old board games and no TV was going to make us fast friends.

I'd glared at him, and his face went tomato red – right to the tips of his earlobes.

He had meant that Luca and I look nothing alike. Luca's father was Italian, and he married Luca's mother when he migrated to England, before they decided to settle in Australia, where Luca was born. I never met Luca's parents, because they died before he married Mum. I've seen photos: he looks a lot like his father with the same kind, dark eyes. Luca is also tall but broad, with dark, olive skin and he wears his black hair in a policeman's buzzcut.

'I just mean he's not, like, your *actual* dad – right?'

'Luca *is* my dad,' was all I'd said. Because I didn't think Sam deserved to know all the details of how Luca adopted me when I was three.

'So why don't you call him that?'

I used to. But I stopped a couple of years ago, after I figured out that he was about to be my father for longer than she had been my mum. I felt sick about that: like I was letting her down somehow. So I started calling him Luca, and then I was afraid that if I stopped, I'd have to explain why I started in the first place. I wonder if there's a worse feeling than knowing that no matter what you do, you'll hurt someone you love without meaning to.

But I didn't tell Sam any of that.

It might have been something I talked about with Luca that day, when we were up in the air and far away from how much everything had been changing on the ground back home.

But instead I was stuck up there with Sam, and his stupid heavy breathing and rude questioning. I started swinging my legs, a little at first and then – maybe even a little bit on purpose – in bigger back-and-forth sways that made the chair rock and tilt.

Sam's eyes flew open. 'Stop it!'

'Oh, don't be such a baby,' I said.

'STOP IT!' he screamed.

'Come on, this is the best part!' I rocked my legs just a little more. 'Try to touch the treetops!'

But then I saw the grown-ups in front turn around to glare at us, as well as a few passing on our side, so I stilled my legs – but the chair kept rocking anyway, tipping and tilting to my momentum.

'Fred!' Sam yelled again, and he threw his arms out like he was maybe going to hit me to get me to stop. I jerked

away and that made the chairlift bob and sway even more, and because his face was suddenly so wet with tears and sweat Sam's glasses slipped right off his head.

He made a move like he could reach down and grab for them, so I tugged his arm away, afraid that he'd keep leaning and somehow go tumbling over the safety bar.

We watched his glasses plummet into the thick bush below, hitting a couple of branches of a gum tree on the way down, and all the while we kept climbing higher and higher up.

By the time we got back to the summit, Sam was crying in big gulps. I raised the metal bar and Sam jumped off before the attendant said to, and he nearly crashed onto his knees. Sam put his head down and kept running until he literally slammed into Anika and they wrapped their arms around each other.

I watched as Luca knelt down to Sam's height, and saw his face change while Sam told them what had happened.

'Get in the car,' was all Luca said when I came up to them. He wouldn't even look at me when he said it.

That trip home was so quiet. As our car crawled down the mountain I felt my belly sink lower and lower with us. I found a new worst feeling in the world when we reached the bottom.

## Bright and terrible

Sorrento has always been the type of place where the houses have names, and ours was called *Il Castello di Maria*, for my mum.

Pop started building it the year she was born, and our family have lived here ever since. The name is a fancy Italian way of saying *Maria's Castle*, which was also kind of a joke. We were part of the Sorrento regulars, not the holiday-chasers – the house was a low weatherboard many roads over from the beach, about as royal as Arthurs Seat. And our surname was Owen, nothing Italian about that. Not until Mum married Luca, then she and I became Owen-Ricci.

When we pulled into the gravel driveway of *Il Castello*, Anika and Sam got out of the car but Luca told me to stay put. We watched them walk inside, Anika with an arm around Sam's shoulders, his head bowed. It wasn't until the front door closed behind them that Luca turned around.

'I'm so disappointed in you, Winifred.'

'I know,' I said, and I took the bottom of my t-shirt

between my fingers, kept my eyes down and concentrated hard on that little strip of fabric.

‘Can you look at me?’

Luca always says that people have ‘tells’ that give them away when they’re guilty of something. It’s his job to pick up on them, since he’s a policeman – which means he knows exactly how hard it is to look someone in the eye when you’ve done the wrong thing. It’s why my head felt like lead, and I needed to take a deep breath to meet his stare.

‘What you did with Sam was inexcusable, but worse than that it was reckless and dangerous. One of you could have been seriously hurt!’

*Reckless* and *dangerous* were policeman words. *Inexcusable* was too – they all meant I’d been bad today, as if I’d broken something.

‘It was an *accident*. I didn’t even want to be up there with him in the first place!’

‘What? I asked and you said you were fine –’

‘No, I didn’t! Today was *our* thing, and you just stuck me with him!’

‘That’s no excuse for *terrifying* the kid!’ Luca’s voice rose.

‘I know that!’ I practically screamed, and Luca’s eyes widened in shock. I looked out my window. It was still only afternoon, but while everything had been sunny and beautiful before, now it all looked too bright and terrible.

‘I’m disappointed in you, Winifred. Because I know you can be better and kinder than you were today,’ Luca said, and I felt my eyes begin to sting, ‘and because we’re a family now, and you’re going to be a big sister.’

I laughed a little at that, but not because it was funny.  
'Sam is *not* my brother.'

'I'm not talking about Sam.' Luca was staring at me.  
'That's what today was about. We wanted to tell you together – you and Sam – that you're both going to be . . .' He faltered, and then the words just came tumbling out. 'We're going to have a baby, Anika and me.'

*No.*

*No, no, no, no.*

'Winifred? Do you hear what I'm telling you?'

I didn't want to look at him. I didn't want to know.

'Winifred?'

I unbuckled my seatbelt, reached for the handle and flung the door open. I ran inside, past where Anika and Sam were sitting at the kitchen counter, and not stopping when I heard Luca calling to me. I ran down the hall to my room and slammed the door.

## RRC and an album of memories

I apologised to Sam that same afternoon, and then about a hundred more times – but it was into next week and he still wouldn't talk to me. He had to wear his old, babyish pair of glasses with light-blue frames that pinched the bridge of his nose. Every time I saw them, I felt my shame pinching too.

In the last week of school holidays I went to visit Pop at the RRC – the Rye Rehabilitation Centre – which was two sections away on the 787 Sorrento to Safety Beach bus.

I can't really remember it, but Pop used to live with us in the big house when it was just me, him and Mum. But then Luca came when I was three, and Pop had a granny flat built out the back – a little boxy house with a brown roof, cream walls and a ramp out the front. Inside it had a tiny kitchenette, lounge room, bedroom and bathroom.

I once asked Pop why he didn't live with us in the big house. He said, 'A castle can only have one king,' and I still don't really know what that means. And I never even thought to ask why he didn't have his own house someplace else. I could never imagine him not being with us.

But then late last year it really happened.

Pop slipped in the shower and cracked two of his ribs. He didn't tell us – he just pretended everything was okay, even though he was limping a little bit. He came up to the big house for breakfast and dinner as usual and helped me with my homework every day after school.

But two days later, he couldn't get out of bed and we had to call an ambulance.

He stayed in hospital for two weeks, and then he caught a bout of pneumonia and had to stay for four more. I thought he'd come back to his flat after that.

But he couldn't. Luca said the fall had shaken him, and he wasn't as young as he used to be. He said it'd take longer for Pop to heal, so Pop moved into the RRC – but only temporarily. It's this big place that's not really a hospital, and not really a nursing home, but something in between. He even had to walk with a frame while his ribs were still recovering.

Luca said we'd go visit every weekend. But it was too hard to go from seeing Pop every day to only once a week. So Luca bought me a bus ticket and travelled the 787 with me twice to make sure I'd be okay. I promised not to talk to strangers, and to let the RRC receptionist know when I arrived and when I was leaving, so he could call in and check on me. That's what it's like to have a policeman for a father.

Luca let me go there every Wednesday afternoon, plus every weekend he'd take me too. It still wasn't the same as having Pop back home, but at least it was something.



That afternoon I knocked on Pop's bedroom door and he called 'Come in, Fred!' because he knew the bus timetable as well as I did by then.

Pop's room at the RRC smelt like English breakfast tea, and this cinnamon cologne he sprayed on himself every morning. It was how his flat still smelt even though it was just sitting there empty in our backyard like a giant garden ornament.

'So did Luca tell you about the baby?' Pop asked me right away. He was sitting in a reading chair by the window, a paperback book open in one hand and his grey eyes focused on me.

'You knew!'

Pop and Luca spoke on the phone a couple of nights a week.

He nodded. 'For a while now.' And then he sighed when I gave him a hurt look. 'It was not my news to tell you, Fred.'

I slipped my backpack from my shoulders and went to give him a kiss on the cheek, and then sat cross-legged on the floor by his feet.

'You know, Maria – your mother – would be happy for him.'

I frowned, and instead of saying something I got up on my knees and reached over to Pop's coffee table where his photo albums were stacked. He has a ton of them in a big wooden chest in his flat, but the chest was too big for this room at the RRC, so he just took his two favourites with him: thick ones full of the last thirty years.

‘You know it’s true, Fred –’ Pop started to say, but before he could get another word in I’d flipped open one of the albums.

‘Where was this taken?’ I pointed to a photo of him and Nan that I really liked. It was in black and white, but you could still tell that the heels she was wearing were leopard print, and I thought she looked wicked cool in them.

Pop looked over my shoulder, squinting to see. ‘Queenscliff, for our anniversary one year,’ he said, and then he smiled.

I held up a photo of Mum next, from her secondary school days – her blonde hair was flicked out around her head, and she was wearing a school uniform with a short blue skirt and neatly tucked white shirt. The photo had this glow of the olden days.

‘What was she like in high school?’ I asked, pleased that Pop wasn’t talking about Luca, Anika or the baby anymore.

‘She went on a tear – skipping school and going into the city every chance she could, hanging out with boys with bad haircuts.’ Pop sighed. ‘We lost Winifred the year before and it hit her hard.’

Nan died of cancer when my mum was a teenager. When I was really little, I could never understand how Mum grew up without her mum around. I couldn’t imagine how that could be – and then it happened to me.

‘There was a lot I probably missed, but . . .’ He shook his head a little. ‘You’re lucky you’ll have Anika around, to talk about growing up and getting older. And things you maybe don’t want to talk to your dad or me about . . .’

I rolled my eyes and reached for the second of Pop's albums. It was my favourite one, from Mum and Luca's wedding. The cover was this baby-blue leather with the words 'Wedding Memories' in curly white writing. I opened the book up and there were the three of us – Mum, Luca and me as a toddler – stuck down on the page, behind a sheet of clear plastic.

My mum was beautiful, even though she wasn't wearing a proper wedding gown like the ones you see in movies and on TV – just this simple flowing dress, in a buttery yellow colour with little pearl buttons all the way down the middle. Her skin was lightly tanned and her hair was twisted up on her head so you could see the small diamond earrings that Luca had given her. They used to belong to his mama, and are waiting for me in his dresser for when I'm older.

Luca looked a lot younger then, probably because he had long black hair. He shaved it all off when he became a policeman. He wasn't wearing a tux or anything fancy in the photo either, just this crisp white shirt tucked into black pants. Someone had stuck a yellow daisy in a buttonhole on his shirt, right in the middle of his chest, so he'd match Mum. I could almost remember picking it for him, and holding it up – him crouching down and helping me stick it through the buttonhole . . .

He was holding me up in the photo, kind of in the crook of one arm and so my head was level with his, and Mum was standing on his other side, her arm hooked around his middle.

'We look really happy here.'

‘Because you really were,’ Pop said.

And I believed him. Even if I couldn’t really remember how happy we were, I felt better because Pop still did.

‘Why didn’t you get married again after Nan died?’ I asked. When I was little I was so worried about Luca falling in love; but I figured that because Pop hadn’t, there was a good chance it would always just be the three of us.

‘It was different for your nan and me. We had a lifetime together and there was never going to be anyone else. But with Luca and Maria . . . it wasn’t fair, they should have had more time.’

I whispered the next part, and Pop had to lean down a little to hear me: ‘Do you think he still loves her?’

I didn’t need to say who. Pop knew I meant Mum.

‘Fred, you should know that it’s very easy to be both happy and sad at the same time, and it’s possible to love two people at once, and miss someone so much even while you move on without them,’ he said, and sighed. ‘And yes, I think he still loves her. That’s a good question to ask Luca, so you can hear him tell you so.’

But I knew I wouldn’t. Because it was also possible to want to know an answer so badly, but still be too scared to ask the question.