

Chapter 1

Before Toby Arrived

Amber's granny has put the electric blanket on especially for Amber. It's still a treat, the electric blanket; a special thing for the grown-ups, a thing you have to earn.

She's been allowed a biscuit with her milk, and she's been allowed to stay up and watch the television until past bedtime (although this might be a mistake on her granny's part, because it's been a while since they saw her and she might have just got it wrong. Amber hasn't mentioned bedtime just in case). And now that the television has finished, Amber is climbing into a bed that is all warmed up for her by the glorious, elusive electric blanket.

The nightlight is already on. It's a toadstool, but inside there are little people sitting around a table, and there's a bed in the corner with a girl sleeping in it. The toadstool is white and red, and the light shines through the holes in the toadstool's top, and also through the toadstool's doors and windows. Amber's granny is sitting on the bed, near Amber's knees. She's been saying prayers, but Amber doesn't listen to these. She asked her mum about them once, and her mum said that her granny was just 'a bit too religious' and that Amber should think of them as nice things her granny likes to say at bedtime.

Actually, they make Amber want to laugh. Once she got a terrible fit of the giggles, and Amber's granny got very cross and Amber was in lots of trouble. Couldn't stop the giggles though. But tonight Amber doesn't laugh, she just enjoys the feel of the electric blanket and waits for the lullaby.

Amber's mum and dad are in the hospital. They've been waiting *weeks* for this. Every night at bedtime Amber's mum has been saying to her, 'Now remember, if I'm not here in the morning, I'll be having your baby brother.' And Amber has said, 'The bump!' and her mum has said, 'Sleep well, sweet heart.' That's why Amber's granny has come all the way from Ireland, to look after Amber while her mum and dad go into the hospital. Amber's granny asks Amber if she would like to hear the lullaby again tonight, and Amber says 'Yes please.' Ordinarily, Amber's granny talks very loudly, and Amber's mum says this is because she is losing her hearing. (And then Amber's granny says, 'I am not losing my bloody hearing,' and

then Amber's mum says, 'Oh yes you 'bloody' are.'). But when her granny sings quietly at bedtime, her voice is like a whisper.

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy when skies are grey.

You'll never know, dear, how much I love you, so please don't take my sunshine away.

The lullaby gives Amber the chills, but that's why she likes it. She listens carefully to the words as her granny sings. The words of the lullaby don't really make sense to Amber. She thinks: If I am your sunshine, then how could I take your sunshine away? Doesn't make sense. She asked her mum once what the words of the lullaby really meant, and her mum said it was a song about loving someone. Amber knew it was about more than that, and so she frowned. Then her mum said, 'It's a happy song.' But Amber knew that was a lie, too.

I'll always love you and make you happy, if you will only say the same.

But if you leave me and love another, you'll regret it all some day.

Amber's granddad is dead. She's seen photos of when he was in the navy. He looks very young in the photos, and he has blond hair, like Amber's mum. Her granny's hair is all fluffy grey curls – it is very *very* soft, softer than Amber's own hair – and she has eyebrows that arch up way over her eyes and make her look surprised all the time, even though she sometimes says to Amber's mum that she is no longer surprised by anything in this world.

The nightlight makes shadows on the wall. Amber presses her hands into the electric blanket to try and feel the wires that make it hot, but she can't feel anything different to a regular blanket. She wonders if her granny has remembered to switch off the electric blanket at the wall. She doesn't want to interrupt the lullaby by asking, though, so she decides to check the socket after her granny has gone back downstairs.

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy when skies are grey.

You'll never know, dear, how much I love you, so please don't take my sunshine away.

Amber has got brown hair, but when she was born she came out bald – she's seen the photos. Her mum told her what she weighed as well; she can't remember what it was now, but she knows it was a good weight because her granny said she was nice and sturdy. Amber wonders what a baby brother is going to be like. Her granny is nearly finished (the lullaby is always the same) and Amber has closed her eyes to pretend to be asleep, even though she's going to sit up and read her book by the light of the toadstool later. She makes a list in her head of what she's going to do after her granny has gone: check the electric

blanket socket, eat the biscuit she has hidden in her bedside table for a midnight snack, and read up to the end of the next chapter of her book.

You told me once, dear, you really loved me, and no one else could come between.

But now you've left me and love another, and you have shattered all of my dreams.

Amber rolls onto her side and starts to suck her thumb, even though her granny usually tells her she's too old for things like that. ('Do you need a dummy?' her granny says – and, no, Amber does not need a dummy. She's not a *baby* anymore.) She tries to see through her eyelids, but all she can see is the dark red colour and the little worms, and so she stops trying to see and just listens to the last bit of the lullaby in the lovely warm of the electric blanket and in the hospital, Amber's brother's head has appeared and – yes! – it has blond hair and – yes! – it's a perfect beautiful blond baby boy! and Amber's granny's voice gets even softer as she sings, *The other night dear, as I lay sleeping, I dreamed I held you in my arms. When I awoke, dear, I was mistaken, and so I hung my head and I cried.*