

# Cathy Hopkins

Cinnamon Girl 

This Way  
To Paradise

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## Chapter 1

# Sham-poooh!



‘We’re here,’ I said into the phone as I flopped on to my bed. I’d positioned it next to the window so that I could lie and look up at the clear July sky or sit and look down at what was happening on the street below.

‘What’s it like?’ asked Erin at the other end of the phone.

‘Heaven. Magic. Totally fab,’ I said as I took in the view of the trees and roof tops of the houses opposite.

‘Boys?’

‘Give me a break! I’ve only been here half a day.’

‘That’s long enough. You’re slacking, India Jane. What have you been doing?’

‘Getting here, Miss Bossy Boots. Unpacking my stuff. What else?’

‘Pff,’ said Erin. ‘Get your priorities straight, girl. I’d be straight out and off down Portobello Road, checking out the local talent.’

‘I will. I promise. As soon as I can and I’m sorry I haven’t had a chance to do a proper recce yet but, from what I’ve seen so far, I have to say that it’s looking good. Aunt Sarah’s house is only a couple of streets away from Notting Hill tube and when we drove past there, I did see a few contenders.’

‘I am soooo jealous,’ said Erin. ‘Only you would get to live in deepest trendyville. I so wish I was there with you in London instead of stuck over here in leprechaun land.’

‘Me too. You could always run away. I’m sure Mum and Dad wouldn’t mind. You know what they’re like. Mr and Mrs Liberal. They’ve already adopted an orang-utan in Malaysia, a donkey in Devon and a goat in Africa. A run-away teenage girl would give them a complete set.’

‘Don’t be cynical,’ said Erin. ‘Your parents are top. I like that they give to good causes. Shows they care about stuff.’

‘Well, I suppose that we can be grateful that at least the goat, donkey and orang-utan aren’t here with us. Seems like everyone else is. I escaped straight up to my room for a bit of peace. It’s mad downstairs. Dad’s bossing everyone around in his usual manner. They’re all here “helping” with the move, but actually getting in the way.’

‘Who? Who’s there?’

‘Ethan, his wife Jessica, Lewis, Dylan, Aunt Sarah, of course,

and I saw my cousin Kate for a second, but she was off somewhere in a hurry as always. Ethan and Jess brought the twins too. Ethan's been training them to say, "We are the evil twins. The daughters of Satan." It's so funny because they're so cute and angelic-looking with great blue eyes and curly hair. They're not much help with the unpacking though. Ethan —'

'Ah, Ethan, swoon, swoon. Is he still gorgeous and a half?'

'He is — and way too old for you.'

'No, he's not. I'm fifteen.'

'Yeah and he's twenty-eight and married and, before you say anything, Lewis is also too old for you.'

Ethan is my step-brother from Dad's first marriage. He had come over to welcome us to the big city, as had Lewis. Dylan (who's twelve) and Lewis are my real brothers, but Lewis won't be living with us as he is a student and has digs up in Crouch End in North London.

'Nah, Lewis is a baby,' said Erin. 'He's only nineteen, isn't he?'

I laughed. Just before my family left Ireland, Erin decided that she was into older men. Like, at least twenty. I can see her point — as boys of our age do act immature most of the time, but I think that older boys can be difficult as well. Like in the trying it on department (and I don't mean trying on clothes).

'OK. Now, tell me everything,' said Erin. 'I want to be able to see it all in my head so, when we talk or e-mail, I can imagine exactly what it looks like. Start with the front door, no, start before that. At the front gate. On the street. Give me details.'

‘OK,’ I said. ‘Details. Holland Park. *Très chic* —’

‘Who picked you up at the airport?’ Erin interrupted.

‘Aunt Sarah.’

‘In what?’

‘She’s got a new black BMW. She’s loaded, don’t forget.’

‘Then what?’

‘We came straight here. Took just over an hour. The traffic is something else.’

‘Weather in Londinium?’

‘Lovely. A beautiful summer’s day. Not a cloud in the sky. What’s it like over there in Kilkerry?’

‘Duh. Raining, of course.’

‘Of course.’ I knew all about the rain in Ireland. For the duration of our two years over there, my parents had rented a castle. They liked living in interesting locations. All my life we’ve stayed in unusual places, and the castle was beautiful, no doubt about that, stunning in fact and a nice enough place to live when the weather was good, which was hardly ever. It really does rain a lot in that part of Ireland and the castle leaked. We were forever running around with bowls, pots and pans to catch the relentless drips. I even woke up one morning to find a hole in the ceiling in my room and a mini waterfall gushing through. It’s an aspect of living there that I’m not going to miss, which is why it’s so heavenly to be at Aunt Sarah’s. As well as being loaded, she is organised, stylish and together in a way that my mum can only watch in wonder. No leaks in her gaff. Oh no.

All surfaces, walls and ceilings are sealed, damp-proofed and painted in tasteful shades of designer paint. Not that Mum isn't stylish, she is in her own boho-waif way. It's the organised and together bit she's not good at. Nor is Dad, for that matter. They're like Peter Pan and Wendy. I sometimes wonder how the two have them have managed so far. Actually, I know exactly how. Grandpa's inheritance, that's how. The inheritance which has now run out, hence our moving in with Mum's sister and her daughter, Kate.

'The house is a dream, Erin, I'll take some pics and e-mail them to you. It'll be better if you can see for yourself.'

'Just tell me a bit to give me a rough idea.'

'OK. It's tall, cream and *très chic*. Five storey, like most of the houses in the street are. Six bedrooms, three reception rooms and a private studio at the bottom of the back garden that Aunt Sarah uses as her office. Dylan and I are on the top floor and we have our own bathroom with the most amazing power shower that has a nozzle head thingee as big as a football. Kate's room is on the second floor and next to it a spare guest room and another bathroom. Aunt Sarah and Mum and Dad's rooms are on the first. All the rooms are huge and light with high ceilings, big windows and wooden floors. She's done it out in neutral tones and added colour with all her knick knacks, rugs and bits and pieces from places she's visited around the world – mainly Thailand and India, I think.'

'Sounds wonderful.'

‘It is. The only rooms that are a bit dark are the basement, and the kitchen – which is at the back of the house. It’s tall and narrow and has one of those ancient pulley drying-racks hanging from the ceiling. People used them in olden days to hang their washing on before they had machines and dryers.’

‘Is that how your aunt dries her washing then?’

‘No way. She uses it to hang her pans and utensils on. It’s brilliant – you can haul them right up out of the way. You’ll see it when you come over later in the summer.’

‘I can’t wait. What’s your room like?’

‘Pretty. Simple seaside colours. Sky blue and pale sand. Aunt Sarah said I can put what I like on the wall to make me feel at home. I carried the pic of us two over in my hand luggage. It’s the first thing I put out in here.’

‘And so it should be. The one we had taken in Dublin?’

‘Yeah.’

The photo of Erin and me was taken at a train station in Dublin when we were on a school trip a few weeks before I left. I’d had the photo blown up so that it would fill a silver frame that Grannie Ruspoli gave me one Christmas. Erin is pushing her nose up with one of her fingers and has gone cross-eyed and I’m sitting behind her doing my zombie face. Not our most attractive picture together, but I liked it because it reminded me of what a laugh we always have. In reality, Erin is tomboyish-looking with an elfin face and short honey-blond hair. She lives in jeans and Converse All Stars (after I turned her

on to them). All the boys back in Ireland fancy her. Not that she fancies them back, apart from Scott Malone – the top cutie at our school, who everyone fancies. She is very picky and says she'd rather wait for the right one than compromise. That only makes boys chase her more, as boys like a challenge (according to my brothers).

'You going to be OK, then?' asked Erin.

'Yeah. Hope so. I still feel nervous about starting a new school in September. I'm going to *so* hate being the new girl again.'

'You'll be fine. You're a babe, plus you're a Gemini. They're one of the best star signs for making new friends. People will be falling over themselves to get in with you.'

'Yeah, right. Just like everyone was when I started at your school. Not. We didn't become mates for almost a year.'

'Ah well, I'm a Taurian. We like to take time to make up our minds about people but, when we do, we're very loyal.'

'I know. Now, I can't get rid of you. God knows I've tried! I mean, look, I've moved country and yet you're still calling me.'

Erin laughed at the other end. 'I'm going to go now. I'm not going to take those kind of insults from a low life like you. Actually I do have to go, Dad's calling. He wants me to wash the car, like, sometimes I wonder what his last slave died of. Anyway, e-mail or text and send pics of boys and the house. OK?'

'Will do.'

'Actually, wait a mo, India J. Before you go, I'm going to give you some homework.'

‘Homework?’

‘Yes. You have to go out today some time and take a pic of the cutest boy you see then e-mail it to me, OK?’

‘Yes sir, sergeant major, SIR!’

‘Dismissed,’ said Erin and hung up.

After I’d put the phone down, I was about to start unpacking when I heard Mum calling me from downstairs.

I went down to see what she wanted and found her in the hall. She looked flustered. ‘You haven’t seen my purse, have you?’

I shook my head.

‘We need milk, sweetheart,’ she continued as she searched the hallway for her bag. ‘With all these extra people here, it’s all gone. Would you be a love and pop out and get us some?’

‘But I don’t know where to get it,’ I protested.

‘Then find out,’ said Dad, bursting into the hall from the kitchen and overhearing the last part of our conversation. Dad never enters a room. He always *bursts* in like a tornado, creating commotion and noise in his wake – partly because he’s a big man, a presence, and partly because of his larger-than-life personality. ‘You’ll have to find your way soon enough.’

‘But . . .’ I was about to object then realised that there was no point. It was typical of Dad to make me go out into a strange place on my own. It wouldn’t occur to him that I might feel wary of the area until I knew my way around more. It’s like how he taught us to swim. He threw us in at the deep end. It was

only when Dylan looked like he was drowning that Dad realised that sometimes it's better to be cautious. Dad's totally insensitive to new things and change. He loves it. Thrives on it. Sees it all as one big adventure and, because he does, he thinks the rest of us do. Hence the five different places I'd lived in by my fifteenth birthday.

Aunt Sarah came into the hall after Dad. Nobody would ever know that she and Mum were sisters to look at them. Mum takes after my late grandmother, who was a typical English rose, and Aunt Sarah takes after Grandpa, who was short and stocky. Mum is tall and willowy with delicate features, whereas Aunt Sarah is smaller and curvier. With her dark hair, she looks more like she could be related to Dad's family, who are Italian. Both Mum and Aunt Sarah are into the 'designer hippie' look, though, and favour clothes and accessories from the Far East, which is pretty cool for me as I like a lot of that stuff too.

'Where can India Jane get milk?' asked Dad.

'Out to the street, turn left, down to the lights, over the road and there's a mini mart next to Starbucks,' said Aunt Sarah.

'Excellent,' said Dad. 'India will find it, won't you?'

'But I can't find my purse,' said Mum.

Aunt Sarah sighed, found her bag and gave me a ten pound note.

'And can you pop into a chemist's and get me some shampoo?' asked Dad. 'Any old kind will do. Thanks, angel.'

I quickly ran back upstairs to put some shoes on, then spent

a few minutes getting ready. After all, it was my first venture out into deepest trendyville, as Erin had called it. I opened one of the suitcases that hadn't been unpacked yet and threw a few things out on to the floor. I pulled off the T-shirt I was wearing, put my cinnamon-coloured wrap-around dress on over my jeans and slung a brown leather belt and a silver Indian belt around my hips. I checked my appearance in the long mirror to the left of the door. A tall slim girl with brown eyes, long chestnut hair and copper highlights looked back at me. Was the dress over jeans a look that was 'over' here in London? I wondered. It was a fashion that had been in and out a few times in the last few years. Erin and I liked the look and we also always wore two belts regardless of whether the mags said it was in or out. I liked to pick items of fashion from different eras and sling them together to make my own look. I wound my hair up and fixed it in place with the red and black lacquered chopstick I always used. A slick of Brick lippie and I was ready.

'India Jane, people are waiting for their tea,' Dad called up the stairs.

That's another thing Dad is. Impatient. Always wants everything yesterday.

I grabbed my digi-cam in case I saw any boys to e-mail to Erin and hurtled back down the stairs and out of the door.

I followed Aunt Sarah's instructions and soon saw the shops that I was to go to. It felt good to be out on such a lovely day and

feel the sun on my skin. My spirits rose further as a couple of cute boys on bikes rode past and waved at me. I was so looking forward to living in London. I'd been before when we'd come over to stay with Aunt Sarah, but we'd never stayed longer than a week and the last time we'd visited had been years ago. This time we'd be living here and I couldn't wait to explore and see what was out there.

As I passed by Starbucks, I immediately noticed a boy sitting in the window talking on his mobile phone. I quickly whipped out my shades and put them on so that I could look again without him knowing that I was specifically ogling him. He was *exactly* my type, which was amazing because I had never seen my type in the flesh before – only in movies or magazines. He was wearing black jeans and a T-shirt and was talking animatedly to the person on the other end of his phone. If he was typical of London boys, things were looking good. As I focused on him behind my glasses, I confirmed to myself that he was *über* good-looking: medium height, slim with shoulder-length brown hair with a slight curl, and a great bone structure. I always notice things like that because I want to be an artist, and drawing people's faces is what I like doing best. As he finished his call and looked out of the window, his expression became moody as if he was thinking hard about something or someone. *Erin would just die if I sent a pic of him*, I thought. She had a pin-up on her wall of an actor from the 1950s called James Dean. He was in a film called *Rebel Without a Cause* and

this boy had the same expression on his face as James Dean had in the poster – sort of moody, broody and dangerous. I positioned myself at the bus stop outside the café and aimed my camera as if I was taking a general shot of the front of the building. At the very last minute, I aimed it at the boy and clicked.

I checked to see the shot and, bingo, it was perfect. Erin was going to be so jealous and this was only my first day. I clicked the camera shut and glanced back into the window. The boy was staring straight at me. As our eyes met, I felt a butterfly flutter in my stomach. I quickly turned away, walked towards the general store and reassured myself that he couldn't have known that I was looking at him as I had my shades on. They're big and black. No one could see through them. Erin and I had tested them before I bought them in Ireland.

When I reached the mini mart, I took off my glasses, bought the milk and a chocolate bar then went into the chemist's for Dad's shampoo.

There was the usual array for different types of hair – dry, greasy, frizzy, coloured, damaged. Shampoos with fruits, herbs, aloe vera, all sorts of magic ingredients. In the end, I grabbed one that was an attractive blue colour and headed for the till. An old lady was in front of me and, as I was waiting, I looked around the shop for future reference.

The shop door opened and the boy from Starbucks came in. I quickly looked away but not before I noticed that he was taller

than he'd looked in the café. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see that he went over to a shelf to the right and began looking at toothbrushes. He picked one out and headed to the counter and stood behind me. I turned away as I didn't want to be caught staring. Instead, I studied the display on the counter in front of me.

The Indian man who was serving finished with the old lady then nodded at the boy behind me.

'Hi, Joe,' he said.

'Hey, Mr Patel,' said the boy and he held up his toothbrush, 'for my trip.'

'Lucky you,' said Mr Patel.

'Yep. Gonna be away for most of the summer.'

Mr Patel nodded. 'I know. Your mother was in earlier buying up supplies too. When are you going?'

'Next week,' said Joe, 'although Mum's going earlier – but, hey, this girl was in front of me, weren't you?'

It was only then that I realised that the items I had been pretending to be so engrossed in were pregnancy tests and it looked as if Joe had noticed. I felt the back of my neck grow warm. 'Er . . . yes, no . . . no, you go ahead,' I blustered. 'No hurry.'

Joe glanced down at the pregnancy tests. 'Sure?' he asked.

'*Quate* sure,' I said in a voice that sounded like the Queen.

'No, please, you go,' said Joe. 'You were here first.'

I held out the shampoo to Mr Patel, who took it then

said, 'We have combs that go with this shampoo.'

'That's OK, I have a hairbrush,' I said. I felt my face go pink as I sensed that Joe was listening.

'Ah, but brushes are no good at all for head lice,' said Mr Patel. 'You need a fine comb to catch the eggs they've laid. Is the shampoo for you?'

Behind me, Joe took a couple of steps back.

I felt myself turn from pink to red. 'Head *lice*!? No way. I . . .'

I glanced down at the bottle. *For head lice*, it said clearly on the label. I hadn't noticed the writing when I'd grabbed it from the shelf. I instinctively put my hand up to my head and Joe stepped back even further. 'I . . . No. Really. It's not for me. I mean . . . I haven't got head lice.'

'No need to be ashamed, my dear,' said the chemist. 'It is very common.'

'No, really . . .' I began to protest.

'So who's the shampoo for?' asked Mr Patel.

'My dad. That is . . . nooooo, he —'

'Ah, your dad,' interrupted Mr Patel, 'even so, it's best if all the family use the shampoo. Head lice spread so fast.'

'But I . . . I mean, neither he nor we have got head lice. *None* of my family have got them.'

I dared to take a quick glance at Joe who had moved behind a make-up display and had an 'oh yeah, pull the other one' look on his face.

'We *really* haven't,' I said to him. 'No need to hide!'

Joe held up his hands and shrugged. ‘Woah, just standing in the queue here.’

I quickly went back over to the hair product display, put the head lice shampoo back on the shelf, got a Fruits of the Forest for normal hair and took it back to the counter. ‘I’ll have this instead,’ I said. ‘It *is* for my dad. NOT for me. And he has totally normal hair. As in NORMAL, no head lice.’

I heard Joe chuckle behind me.

I paid for my shampoo and headed for the door. As I opened it to leave, I could hear both Joe *and* Mr Patel laughing.

As I stomped back up the road, I thought, *Talk about making a good first impression. Possibly pregnant with head lice. I really, really hope that I never bump into that boy ever again. Thank God he’s going on a trip somewhere. The further the better.*