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CATHY GLASS

Cruel to be Kind

Saying no can save a child's life

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«HarperCollins»

Glass C.

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Cruel To Be Kind is the true story of Max, aged 6. He is fostered by Cathy while his mother is in hospital with complications from type 2 diabetes.Cruel To Be Kind is the true story of Max, aged 6. He is fostered by Cathy while his mother is in hospital with complications from type 2 diabetes. Fostering Max gets off to a bad start when his mother, Caz, complains and threatens Cathy even before Max has moved in. Cathy and her family are shocked when they first meet Max. But his social worker isn't the only one in denial; his whole family are too.

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Содержание

Copyright 7
Contents 8
Acknowledgements 9
Prologue 10
A Bad Start 11
Max 13
Amazed 17
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 21

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Certain details in this story, including names, places and dates, have been changed to protect the family's privacy.

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Contents

Cover
Title Page
Copyright
Acknowledgements
Prologue
Chapter One: A Bad Start
Chapter Two: Max
Chapter Three: Amazed
Chapter Four: A Healthy Appetite?
Chapter Five: Restless Night
Chapter Six: Hostile
Chapter Seven: Joining In
Chapter Eight: Tears
Chapter Nine: Act of Defiance
Chapter Ten: An Ally
Chapter Eleven: Stressed
Chapter Twelve: Vulnerable
Chapter Thirteen: Dan
Chapter Fourteen: First Review
Chapter Fifteen: Meetings
Chapter Sixteen: Strange, the Way Things Turn Out
Chapter Seventeen: Abused Child
Chapter Eighteen: Reporting Concerns
Chapter Nineteen: When Will I See Mummy Again?
Chapter Twenty: Comfort Eating
Chapter Twenty-One: Unexpected Turn of Events
Chapter Twenty-Two: Sea Otters Hold Hands
Chapter Twenty-Three: Very Poorly
Chapter Twenty-Four: Tell Max I Love Him
Chapter Twenty-Five: Bittersweet
Chapter Twenty-Six: Tragedy
Chapter Twenty-Seven: Cruel to be Kind
Suggested topics for reading-group discussion
Exclusive sample chapter …
Cathy Glass
If you loved this book …
Moving Memoirs eNewsletter
About the Publisher

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Prologue

Since I began writing my fostering memoirs ten years ago, the number of children in care in the UK has risen to an all-time high of 70,000. Children come into care for many reasons, including physical, emotional and sexual abuse, neglect or a crisis in the family where there is no one to look after them. It is always very sad when a family is separated, and of course the child suffers. This is the story of one of those children: Max.

Chapter One

A Bad Start

'His mother is in hospital having two toes amputated and there have been complications.'

'Oh dear. I am sorry,' I said.

'Max is going to be very upset when I tell him he won't be going home,' Jo, Max's social worker, continued. 'It will be the first time he's been in foster care, although his family are known to the social services. I'm anticipating collecting him at the end of school and then bringing him straight to you, so I'm afraid he'll just have what he stands up in.'

'Don't worry, I've got plenty of spare clothes.' I already knew that Max was six years old.

'Good. Hopefully I'll be able to get some of his belongings tomorrow. I'm going to see his mother, Caz, this evening after I've brought Max to you. She wants him to visit her in hospital.'

'This evening?' I asked, aware that it would be late and Max would already be very unsettled.

'Yes.'

'And you want him to go to school tomorrow?' I needed to know so I could make arrangements to take him.

'I don't see why not. I'll let you know the name and address of his school and the other information you'll need when I see you later.'

'OK. Thank you.'

We said goodbye.

It was now 2 p.m. and I went straight upstairs. I'd been fostering long enough to have accumulated spare clothes for emergency use for children of most ages. Sometimes I had plenty of notice when a child was being brought into care and could prepare for their needs, even meet the child if it was a planned move, but many children just arrived – as Max was going to – with very little notice.

I went first to the airing cupboard where I took out a fresh set of towels, and then continued into my bedroom and to the ottoman where I kept the spare clothes. Lifting the lid, I rummaged through until I found pyjamas, socks and pants for a six-year-old. I didn't have any spare school uniforms so I'd have to wash and dry what Max was wearing. From a drawer in my room I also took out a child's toothbrush and hairbrush. I put the towel and toothbrush in the bathroom, ready for later, and then carried the clothes into what would shortly be Max's bedroom. I'd already thoroughly cleaned and vacuumed it and put on fresh bed linen after the last child had gone. Since Alex (whose story I tell in *Nobody's Son*) had left two weeks previously, I'd looked after a child on respite for ten days who'd now returned to live with his carer.

Satisfied I was as prepared as I could be at such short notice, I returned downstairs to telephone Jill, my supervising social worker from Homefinders, the agency I fostered for. Jill's role was to supervise, monitor and support me in fostering so that the child received the best possible care. She had telephoned me an hour before to say that Max was being brought into care and to ask if I could look after him. Although she'd asked me, it is generally assumed that a foster carer will accept the child referred to them. It's not a pick-and-choose situation. The child coming into care needs a home, so unless there is a very good reason why a carer can't take a particular child then they are expected to do so. From the little I knew, I was happy to accept Max and had no reservations. Jill had given me a brief outline of his home situation and why he was now coming into care. Although Max hadn't been in care before, his family had come to the attention of the social services when some support had been put in, and now, while Max's mother was in hospital, his three teenage sisters were supposed to be looking after him, but last night they'd gone out partying instead. A neighbour had alerted the social services when Max had knocked at her door asking for dinner and she'd taken him in. I also knew from Jill that Max was being brought into care under Section 20 (of the Children's Act), also known as Accommodated. This is when parents 'agree' to place their child in care voluntarily, rather than going to court and risking a care order, which would mean they would lose their parental rights.

Around 30 per cent of children who come into care are placed under Section 20. Jill had said she was hoping to be with me when Max arrived, and I now phoned her to let her know the time.

'OK, see you later,' she said.

I began a quick tidy-up of the living room and also took food from the freezer for dinner later. I knew from experience that when a child first arrived with their social worker there was a lot to get through, and also Jo was expecting me to take Max to visit his mother in hospital, so time would be short.

Adrian, my seven-year-old son, would be pleased to have another boy staying with us, I mused as I worked, although in truth he and my three-year-old daughter, Paula, usually got along with any child we looked after. They'd grown up with fostering, so having someone else living with us was the norm. Also the norm, although it saddens me to say so, was that I was now a single parent, as my husband, John, had left us eighteen months before. I'd taken a short break immediately after he'd gone and then a few months later, with the children's agreement, I'd resumed fostering. I enjoyed fostering – caring for and helping the children while they were with me. It gave another dimension to my life and the small payment I received, together with the part-time work I did from home, paid the bills. At present Adrian was at school and Paula was playing at a friend's house. I would collect her on the way to meet Adrian from school.

I'm always a bit anxious just before a new child arrives, wondering how they will settle and if they will like my family and me, but once they're here I'm so busy that there isn't time to worry. I just concentrate on looking after them and meeting their needs to the best of my ability. This afternoon, however, ten minutes before I was due to leave to collect Adrian and Paula, my anxiety level rose to a new height. The phone rang and I answered it in the hall, expecting Jill or Jo with some more news about Max or a last-minute change of plan, which happens a lot in fostering. However, a rather gruff woman's voice I didn't recognize demanded, 'Is that Cathy Glass?'

'Yes,' I said tentatively. 'Who's calling?'

'Max's mum, Caz. I'm warning you, lay one finger on my boy and you'll be sorry. Do you understand? I might be in hospital but his dad isn't, and he don't stand any nonsense.'

Chapter Two

Max

My heart began to race and my mouth had gone dry. 'Of course I'll take good care of Max,' I reassured his mother, ignoring her slight, and trying to keep my voice even. I appreciated that parents who've just had their children taken into care are often angry and upset, but threatening me before I'd even met the child was a first. However, as worrying as this was, of more concern was how his mother, Caz, had got my number. 'Who gave you my telephone number?' I asked.

'His social worker. Our solicitor told her she had to give it to us, as he's in care voluntarily, or I wouldn't have agreed to him going.' Sometimes the parents of children in care under a Section 20 are given the contact details of the carer, but usually the carer is asked first, and it's in cases where there is no animosity and the parents are working with the social workers and the foster carer in the best interests of the child. I didn't dare ask if she had my address too.

'Make sure you give Max what he wants to eat,' she continued in the same confrontational tone. 'I'll be asking him when I see him what he's had, so it better be good. No cheap rubbish.'

'I always give the children good food, and a balanced diet,' I said. 'When they first arrive I ask them what they like and dislike.'

'Max likes everything and plenty of it, so give him whatever he wants. I've told Jo, the social worker, I'll want to see him every evening. You gonna be bringing him?'

'I expect it will be me,' I said. 'I'm seeing Jo later when she brings Max to me, so she'll tell me about the contact arrangements then.' For even when a child is in care voluntarily it's usual to have a timetable of contact.

'I've told her,' she said. Then, 'You haven't got any dogs, have you? Max don't like dogs. He's been scared of 'em since he got bit.'

'No, we just have a cat, Toscha.'

'That don't bite, does it?'

'No, she's very placid.' And long-suffering, I thought but didn't say.

'Make sure you look after him proper. Understand? When I see him I'll ask him how you've been treating him.'

'He'll be well cared for,' I said evenly. 'Now I'm going to have to go to collect my children. Thank you for phoning.'

'If those stupid girls had done what they were supposed to, none of this would have happened. Silly bitches,' she fumed.

I assumed she meant her teenage daughters. I didn't comment but rounded off the conversation as politely as I could. 'I hope you feel better soon.'

'What do you care?' she snapped, and the phone went dead.

I left the house to collect Paula and Adrian, agitated, worried, and annoyed with Jo for giving Max's mother my telephone number without mentioning it to me or advising her on when to use it. Telephone contact between the child and their family is often part of the contact arrangements, but it has to be regulated or it can become a nuisance for the foster family, and upsetting for the child when they are trying to settle in. It's certainly not supposed to be used to harass and threaten the carer. I'd raise it with Jill and Jo when I saw them later, out of earshot of Max. The poor child, I thought. It's so important for any child coming into care to see their parents getting along with the foster carer and working together with them – it helps the child come to terms with what has happened.

This certainly wasn't the best start. There is so much more to fostering than just looking after the child, which is often the easiest and most pleasant part. However, I consoled myself that Caz was angry that her child was coming into care, and hopefully things would settle and improve as time went on. I had no idea how long Max would be staying with me, but that's often the case in fostering.

Perhaps it would just be for the time his mother was in hospital, although the social services would need to be certain he would be well cared for and safe before they returned him home.

Half an hour later I'd collected Paula from her friend's house and Adrian from school, and as we walked home I was telling them about Max. It was the beginning of July and the day had turned very warm, so I was carrying their jerseys as well as Adrian's school bag; he had his games kit to carry.

'Max is a nice name,' Paula said, giving a little skip and already excited at the prospect of a new playmate.

'Yes, it is,' I agreed.

'Can we play in the garden when Max arrives while you and the social worker talk?' Adrian asked, aware that the adults did a lot of talking when a child was first placed.

'Yes, if Max wants to,' I said. 'But remember, he might be shy and uncertain to begin with. He'll be missing his family and everything will be new and strange to him.' However, if Max did want to go into the garden to play with Adrian and Paula while the social worker and I talked, it would make discussing his situation considerably easier. She would need to share information about Max, his family and home life with me and it's not usually appropriate to do so in front of the child, so if Max could be entertained in the garden, so much the better.

'He could have an ice cream if he's upset,' Adrian suggested cannily.

'And me,' Paula said. 'It's not fair if just Max has an ice cream. Adrian and me should have one too.'

'I think that's what Adrian meant, isn't it?' I said, throwing him a knowing smile.

'Doh!' he said to Paula. 'As if Mum would just give Max an ice cream and leave us out.' There was ice cream and similar sweet desserts in the freezer, but generally I liked the children to have dinner first.

'Yippee! We're going to have fun and an ice cream,' Paula said, delighted. Dropping my hand, she began hopscotching along the pavement.

I hoped that some of their enthusiasm for having Max to stay would help him. I'd found in the past that often the child I was fostering bonded with my children first before me, and once a child starts playing, their anxiety begins to lift. Although, of course, I guessed that Max, like most of the children I'd fostered, was going to be upset to begin with at being separated from his family and having to live with strangers, albeit well-meaning ones. I was expecting tears and sleepless nights at the start. But usually by the end of the first week, when the child is more familiar with their foster family and the new routine and is seeing their parents regularly at contact, they are less anxious.

Once we were home I made the children a cold drink and a snack and then I went with them into the garden to unlock the shed where I kept the outdoor toys. It's part of every foster carer's safer caring policy that sheds and similar outbuildings are kept locked. We took out a selection of toys for them to play with, including Adrian's bicycle, the spare bike for Max, Paula's tricycle, the doll's pram, skateboard and a football. The mini goalposts were still up at the end of the garden and the covered sandpit sat closer to the house. Adrian immediately began practising goal shots while Paula rode her tricycle. I returned indoors to prepare dinner so we could eat as soon as Jo and Jill had left. They were expected around five o'clock and from experience I was anticipating them staying for at least an hour, possibly much longer, when placing a child.

I could see the children from the kitchen window and as I worked, I glanced up regularly to make sure they were all right. My thoughts went repeatedly to poor little Max who at this moment was being told by his social worker that he wouldn't be going home. What a dreadful shock – to go to school in the morning as normal and then not be allowed home at night. My heart went out to him. How was he coping?

About half an hour later, hot from playing, Adrian and Paula came in and sat in the cool living room where Toscha, our cat, was already spread out on the floor by the toy box. I'd put some games and toys in there in case Max didn't want to go outside. Most children can't resist toys, and Adrian and

Paula began doing some puzzles. After about ten minutes, just as I'd finished preparing the dinner for later, the doorbell rang and it was Jill. She greeted me with a warm smile and, 'Hi, Cathy, how are you?'

'We're good, thank you. Would you like a drink?'

'A glass of water, please.'

I asked her to come with me into the kitchen, as I needed to tell her something. She called hi to Adrian and Paula as she passed the living-room door and once in the kitchen I quickly told her of the phone call I'd received from Max's mother.

'That's not on,' she said. 'I'll raise it with Jo. She should have asked you or me first before she gave out your details. She'll need to speak to his mother and explain that's not acceptable. Are you all right taking Max to the hospital to visit her?' Foster carers are expected to transport the child or children they look after to and from contact.

'Yes, although I'll have to take Adrian and Paula with me. I can't leave them with a sitter every time. Do we know how long Max will be seeing his mother for each evening? Visiting is two till eight.'

'I don't know yet. We'll raise it with Jo, and also find out if you have to stay on the ward with him. There's a café in the hospital with a children's play area. It would be better if you could wait there.'

'Yes, thanks. That would be useful. I doubt if there'd be time for me to come home.'

I handed her the glass of water and we went into the living room and settled on the sofa and chair. Jill asked Adrian and Paula how they were.

'Very well, thank you,' Adrian said politely. Paula went into shy mode and came over and sat on my lap, even though she knew Jill from previous visits.

'Are you looking forward to meeting Max?' Jill asked, making conversation and trying to put them at ease.

Paula managed a small nod, while Adrian said a rather formal, 'Yes, thank you.'

Jill smiled. 'It's a lovely day,' she said, glancing towards the garden.

'They're hoping Max will want to play outside,' I said. The patio doors were slightly open and through them came the warm air and the sounds of summer.

'I'm sure he will,' Jill said. 'You've got a nice big garden to run and play in.'

A few minutes later the doorbell rang. 'That'll be Jo with Max,' I said, lifting Paula from my lap and standing. Toscha also looked up.

Paula slipped her hand into mine and came with me, while Adrian stayed with Jill. I opened the front door with a warm, welcoming smile. 'Hello, I'm Cathy.'

'Hello, Cathy, I'm Jo, and this is Max.'

My gaze went to the child standing beside Jo and I had to hide my shock. Dressed in a light blue shirt and navy trousers from his school uniform, he was sweating profusely. Beads of sweat stood on his forehead and ran down his face. His hair glistened and his shirt was wringing wet. He had one hand resting on the wall to support himself, as an elderly person might, and he was struggling to catch his breath. Yes, it was a warm day, but that didn't account for Max's obvious distress. What was responsible – and what no one had thought to mention – was that Max was dreadfully overweight.

'He needs to sit down,' Jo said, coming in. 'He's got an inhaler in here somewhere.' She began undoing the school bag she was holding as Max took hold of the doorframe and heaved himself over the doorstep into the hall.

'Sit down here, love, until you get your breath,' I said, directing him to the chair we kept in the hall by the telephone.

He dropped into it as Jo took his inhaler from his school bag, shook it and passed it to him. 'Do you know how to use it?' she asked.

Max nodded, gave it another shake, put it to his mouth, took a deep breath, held it and then exhaled. Jo looked as worried as I was.

'I didn't know he had an inhaler,' I said to her. The foster carer should be told of any medical conditions during the first phone call about the child.

'I didn't know either until I collected him,' Jo said, clearly stressed. Max took a second breath from his pump.

'Has he got asthma then?' I asked. Clearly I needed to know so I could be prepared.

'I'm assuming so. I'll find out when I see Caz later.'

Max had administered the second pump and now returned the inhaler to Jo. 'It's just two pumps?' she asked him.

'Yes,' he said, his voice husky.

Jill appeared at the end of the hall. 'Is everything all right?' I could tell from the look on her face that she hadn't been informed of Max's asthma or obesity either. Paula had taken a few steps back and was looking at Max from a short distance, very concerned. In addition to the drama of him needing his asthma pump and Jo's and my concern, this clearly wasn't the child Paula had been expecting. He wasn't simply chubby or what one would describe as a bit overweight; my guess was that he was at least twice the size he should have been, overfed to the point where it was obviously affecting his health and quality of life.

'Shall we go into the living room?' I suggested to Max now his breathing had settled. 'I'll fetch you a drink.'

The poor child heaved himself off the chair and not so much walked as waddled down the hall towards Jill. I always try not to judge, but seeing him in so much obvious discomfort, I thought that, assuming he didn't have a medical condition, whoever had allowed him to get into this state, presumably his mother, was as guilty of child abuse as if he'd been beaten. This hadn't happened overnight; it had taken years of over-eating – probably all his life – for him to get like this.

Chapter Three

Amazed

I saw Adrian do a double take as Max entered the living room, but to his credit he quickly recovered and said a welcoming, 'Hi, I'm Adrian.'

Max nodded and lumbered over to the sofa where he heaved himself onto the seat and sat back. Jo sat beside him as Jill took one of the easy chairs. 'What would you like to drink?' I asked Max.

'Cola,' he said in a husky voice.

'I'm afraid I haven't got any of that,' I said. Like many parents and carers, aware of how bad sweet fizzy drinks were for children's teeth I limited them to special occasions. 'You could have water, fruit juice, milk or squash,' I offered.

'Juice,' he said.

'Jo, what would you like?' I asked.

'A black coffee, please.'

Paula came with me to make the drinks and was clearly worried. As soon as we were out of earshot she said quietly to me, 'What's the matter with Max?'

'He got a bit out of breath. He'll be all right soon when he's sat quietly and had a drink.' But I knew that wasn't the only reason for Paula's question. It was impossible even for a young child (who are generally very accepting of differences) not to notice Max's size.

'Will he be able to play with us?' she asked as I made Jo's coffee.

'Yes, of course, love.'

'How will he ride the bike we got out for him?'

'We'll find some games he can play,' I said positively. 'Now, come on, stop worrying. We'll take him his drink.'

I poured Max's juice and carried it with Jo's coffee into the living room where Jo and Jill were chatting lightly to Max, trying to put him at ease. Adrian was on the floor by the toy box, stroking Toscha. Paula went over and joined him. I gave Jo and Max their drinks and sat in another easy chair. Then a horrendous thought occurred to me. I looked at Jo. 'Animal fur doesn't affect Max's breathing, does it?' It is for reasons like this that any medical condition should be discussed with the foster carer at the time of the referral, not once the child has arrived. Children with allergies to animal fur generally have to be placed in foster families where there are no pets.

'Not as far as I know,' Jo said, taking a grateful sip of her coffee. 'But I wasn't aware he had asthma or was using an inhaler until today. I'll ask his mother when I see her this evening.' Then, looking at Max: 'You have a cat at home, don't you?'

'Two,' Max said. 'Tiger and Smokey.'

'Those are nice names,' I said, relieved.

'And they don't make your breathing bad?' Jill asked him.

'No,' Max said.

'Best keep an eye on it, though,' Jill said. Then to Jo: 'Will he be having a medical?'

'That's something else I'll need to discuss with his mother,' she replied, setting her cup in its saucer. When a child first comes into care they usually have a medical. If the child is in care under a Section 20 then the parent's permission is sought. 'Caz told me he'd had some teeth out earlier this year,' she added, 'but I don't know of any other medical conditions.'

Max had already finished his drink, having swallowed it straight down. 'Would you like another drink?' I asked him, as he was clearly thirsty. He nodded. 'What would you like?'

'Juice.'

I took his glass and went into the kitchen where I poured another glass of juice, aware that even pure juice has a high calorie content from the fructose sugar. Not a good idea for a child who is

already badly overweight. Returning to the living room I passed the glass to Max and he drank down half of it in one go and then sat with the glass resting on his stomach.

'Here's the paperwork you need,' Jo said, handing me the essential information and placement forms.

'Thank you.'

'Could you send a copy to the agency too,' Jill said. 'So we have it on file.' This was normal practice.

'Yes, of course,' Jo said. 'Sorry, I should have realized. It's been a busy day.' She took a notepad from her bag and made a note.

'It's a nice house, isn't it?' Jill said encouragingly to Max. He nodded.

'I'll show you around later,' I said.

'I'm hoping to send some of his belongings over tomorrow,' Jo now said. 'One of his sisters might be able to drop them off. She passes by the end of your road most days on her way to college.'

I looked at Jill. 'I think we'll need to discuss that,' Jill said, nodding pointedly towards Max. For clearly discussing any issue in respect of Max's family was going to be difficult in front of him. There was an awkward silence.

'Now Max has recovered, perhaps he'd like to go in the garden with Adrian and Paula?' I suggested. 'There are some toys out there and a bench in the shade of the tree,' I said to him.

'That sounds nice,' Jo said, appreciating my suggestion. 'Let's take a look, shall we?' She set her cup and saucer on the coffee table and stood. Max, who'd been leaning right back into the sofa, began struggling to get off, shuffling forward but finding it difficult. Jo instinctively offered her hand and helped him off, as one would an elderly person. It was pathetically sad and another indication of just how being badly overweight was blighting his life. Most children would have leapt off the sofa and been down the garden in an instant.

I looked at Max as he waddled towards the patio doors. Of average height for a six-year-old, he had short brown hair, a pleasant face, round and open, and seemed quite placid in nature. I wondered how he coped with the inevitable name-calling in the school playground. My heart went out to him. Children can be cruel and anyone who deviates from the norm can easily become the object of bullying.

Just outside my patio doors there is one small step that leads onto the patio. It's not high and is easily navigated by even small children, but Max now held onto the edge of the door to support himself as if worried he might lose his balance and topple. He carefully turned sideways and tentatively lowered one foot and then the other, as a toddler might. Outside, we all crossed the patio and went onto the lawn where the toys were.

'What would you like to play?' Adrian asked sensitively. 'It's a bit hot for football.' Indeed, Max was perspiring again, although the sun was starting to lose its strength.

'I'll watch while you play,' Max said quietly. 'Like I do at school.' I could have wept. The thought of the poor child having to sit and watch while his friends played instead of joining in touched me. Whether his non-participation was from not being able to run and keep up, discomfort if he tried or a fear of being laughed at I didn't know – possibly a little of each – but it was desperately sad.

Adrian and Paula were looking a little awkward, not sure what to do for the best. 'You can play,' I said to them. 'Max can join in if he wishes or sit on the bench. It's up to him.'

'I'll sit,' he said, and lumbered towards the bench in the shade. Toscha had followed us out of the house and strolled over to join him.

'I'll sit with you,' Paula said to Max, suddenly losing her shyness. I think she felt sorry for him.

'So will I,' Adrian said. I saw Jill smile.

Max heaved himself onto the bench and Adrian sat on one side and Paula the other. Toscha sprawled at their feet.

'I'll leave the patio door open so you can come in when you want,' I said for Max's benefit. Jo, Jill and I then returned to the living room.

I was now expecting Jo to start talking about Max's obesity, including details of the diet he must surely be following and any appointments at the health clinic. But, draining the last of her coffee, she opened her notepad and said to Jill, 'What was the issue with Max's sister bringing his clothes here?'

'Cathy received a rather unpleasant telephone call from Max's mother earlier this afternoon,' Jill said evenly. 'She wasn't aware her contact details had been given to the family. We usually ask our carers first.'

Jo raised her eyebrows. 'His mother wanted the phone number of where Max would be staying and I didn't see a problem in giving it to her. He *is* in care voluntarily.' It sounded as though it was me who had the problem.

'It was quite a threatening call,' I said. 'Caz told me to give Max whatever he wanted or I'd have his father to answer to.'

Jo nodded dispassionately and made a note. 'I'll mention it to her when I see her later.'

'Does the family have Cathy's address too?' Jill asked.

'I'm not sure. I might have mentioned it but I think I just told her the area. She was quite insistent on a number of points before she agreed to Max going into care.'

'Given the nature of the phone call this afternoon, if she doesn't already have the address perhaps we could withhold it for now?' Jill suggested diplomatically. 'We can always review that later.'

'All right,' Jo said, and made another note.

I was grateful for Jill's support. I felt that Jo, like many social workers, didn't fully appreciate how worrying it could be for a carer to have an irate parent phoning or turning up on their doorstep. Social workers don't have this worry, as the families they deal with don't know their home address. While it's often appropriate for the parents of a child in care to have the foster carer's contact details, it didn't hurt to err on the side of caution to keep everyone safe.

Jill took a pad and pen from her bag. 'What are the contact arrangements?' she now asked.

'Caz wants to see Max every evening while she's in hospital, as she has been doing. His sisters have been taking him, but I assume Cathy will be taking him now?'

'Yes,' I said.

'Perhaps his sisters could take his bag to the hospital and Cathy could collect it from there?' Jill suggested.

'That would be good,' I added.

'I'll mention it tonight,' Jo said, making another note. 'Hopefully they can arrange it for tomorrow. It's too late this evening. They'll be on their way to the hospital now – they use the bus.'

'How long will Max see his mother for each evening?' Jill asked.

I picked up my fostering folder and pen so I had them ready to write down the contact arrangements. I start a new folder for each child.

'Caz said they have been visiting between five-thirty and seven, so I think keep to that.'

'Is that all right with you?' Jill asked me.

'I'll have to give the children their dinner before we go or it will be late by the time we get home,' I said, thinking aloud.

'OK,' Jill said. 'See how it goes. Max may be tired after an hour. It's a long time for a child to be on a ward. Do you want Cathy to stay on the ward with Max? She'll have Adrian and Paula with her, so it would be better if they could go and wait in the play area by the café.' A good support social worker is invaluable in clarifying arrangements and making sure they are practical for the carer.

'That should be all right,' Jo said. 'It's not supervised contact. But please be on hand in case Max wants to leave early.'

I wrote the times of contact on a sheet of paper in my folder. 'Will this start tomorrow?' I asked, mindful of the time. 'It's already five-thirty now.'

Jo glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. 'Caz was expecting him this evening, but I take your point. I'm not going to be finished here for a while.'

'Perhaps Max could phone and speak to his mother this evening?' Jill suggested.

Jo nodded. 'I'll speak to Caz once I get there.'

'Will Max be seeing his mother at the weekend too?' I asked.

'Yes,' Jo said, as if it was taken as read. All very well, but that would mean any of our outings at the weekend, including visits to my parents, would need to be curtailed so we were back in time to take Max to the hospital. However, I knew this wasn't negotiable, as contact arrangements take priority over the carer's arrangements. Foster carers get used to fitting in.

'Will you be applying for a Full Care Order?' Jill now asked.

'Not at this stage,' Jo said. 'As long as I have Caz's cooperation, there shouldn't be any need to. She's cooperated in the past.'

'What have been the concerns?' Jill asked, meaning why were the social services already involved with Max's family.

'They've been mainly around the girls. They weren't going to school and two of them have been in trouble with the police. Caz was finding it a struggle to cope. She has various health issues, including type 2 diabetes and a heart condition, so we put in some support.'

'Is Max's weight due to a medical condition?' Jill asked.

'No, I don't think so,' Jo said lightly. 'His mother and sisters are all a bit chubby like Max. They like their food.'

I looked at her, amazed.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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