

Chapter 1 *Family lunch*

On 23 April 1998, Edward Crowe came out from the glacier on the north side of the Matterhorn mountain above Zermatt in Switzerland. He had been dead for seventy-four years.

And on the same day, over 2,000 kilometres away, the three direct descendants of Edward Crowe – his daughter Marjorie and his two grandchildren, Clare and Andrew – were enjoying a rare day together at the family home in Windermere, centre of England's Lake District.

Clare had driven up from London the night before, arriving very late at her mother's house. She had slept deeply in her old childhood bed and hadn't woken until after nine o'clock. She'd stayed in bed for a few minutes, enjoying the quiet outside her window. Here, she was Clare the daughter again, rather than Clare the independent, successful journalist.

She loved coming home to Windermere, even though she'd had her own home and her own life down in London for many years. There was something about the northern part of England, and especially the Lake District where she'd grown up, that was part of her. Despite the awful 400 kilometre-plus journey up the M6 motorway ('Britain's biggest car park' someone had described it as), she always found herself relaxing the further north she got. Usually, by the time she turned off the motorway, it was dark and

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she couldn't see the rocky hills or the waters of Lake Windermere, but she knew they were there.

On this visit she was hoping that being back in this magical landscape would give her time to think about her future. She knew she couldn't continue working at the newspaper for much longer. It was not what she wanted any more. But giving it up was a frightening thought – what else was there in her life?

Now here she was, a forty-six-year-old woman sitting at the dining table with Andrew, the two of them enjoying their mother's cooking.

'Mum, you haven't lost your touch,' said Clare. 'This salmon's great. No-one makes it quite like you.'

'I don't know what's special about it,' replied her mother. 'It's only a bit of grilled salmon. I've been doing it the same way all these years.'

'Exactly,' said Clare. 'That's the whole point – it's very comforting to find that some things don't change.'

'Finish off this last piece then, one of you. I don't want any left,' said Marjorie with a smile.

'Thanks,' said Andrew. 'I'll have it. I'm sorry Jan and the kids couldn't come today. You know how it is, Saturdays are the only time they get to do all their sport and things, and Jan likes to be there for them.'

'I'm not going to be here for ever you know. I want to enjoy my grandchildren while I can,' said Marjorie, busying herself round the table.

'That's exactly what Grandma Agatha used to say about us, but, Mum, that's the first time I've heard you talk about . . .' said Andrew.

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‘Dying,’ said Marjorie, finishing her younger child’s sentence.

‘There’s nothing wrong, is there?’ asked Clare anxiously.

‘Nothing, apart from old age, as far as I know,’ replied Marjorie. ‘Anyway, don’t pay any attention to me.’

‘How’s the garden, Mum?’ asked Andrew. He felt somehow responsible for the way this conversation was going and he thought it better to re-direct it onto safer ground – although Marjorie’s garden could hardly be described as safe ground. For as long as they could remember their mother had fought to make the garden do what she wanted, but it always seemed to have a way of biting back. Some years it was the weather that killed off all the flowers, other years some kind of evil disease seemed to take over and, almost overnight, eat all the young plants she’d just put in. It was a long-running story that was part of their shared family history.

‘Well, thank you for asking, Andrew. I know this may surprise you both but I think I’m winning this year. Everything seems to be doing rather well,’ said Marjorie, looking pleased. ‘Your father would be proud of me.’

There was a silence around the table as they each remembered the person who had brought them together today. Thomas Newton had died a year ago. He’d been cutting the grass in front of the house when Marjorie found him.

‘A heart attack,’ the doctor had said. His death had left a big hole in all their lives.

‘To Dad,’ said Andrew, raising his glass; Clare and Marjorie echoed his words in quiet voices.

It was then that the telephone rang.

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‘I’ll go,’ said Clare, wiping away a few tears.

They could hear her talking in the hall, but when she came back in she looked shocked.

‘That was the Foreign Office, Mum.’

‘Good Lord,’ said Andrew. ‘What did they want?’

Marjorie looked at Clare with surprise and a little fear in her eyes.

‘It’s about your father, Edward. Apparently,’ Clare continued, ‘they’ve found his body. It’s about to be recovered from the foot of a glacier in Zermatt and they want someone to go over there.’