Chapter Two

It was a hazy afternoon, the sun hovering hesitantly over the horizon, struggling to push through the clouds. Steph and Paul had planned a lazy day in the garden, eased by a bottle or two of pinot grigio, snacking on bread and cheese. But an early morning phone call from Steph’s sister had changed everything. Now they had a sulky teenager invading their privacy, and the resentment hung in the air between them like an unpleasant smell.

Conversation flowed like glue. Paul hunted desperately for something to break the silence.

“Don’t you like James Bond films then, Annie?” he asked rather too loudly, as though he needed to fill the emptiness. Steph’s face registered complete disbelief, as though she couldn’t believe how desperately out of touch he was with the younger generation. Instantaneously, she regretted their inability to have children of their own and wondered whether Paul would have handled the situation better if they had ever become parents themselves.

Annie screwed up her mouth into an expression of utter disgust and cut him dead.

“No.”

He tried again “Why not?”

“Cos they’re *boring.*” Annie spat out the final word with disdain. She stuffed her hands into the pockets of her faded black hoodie and looked down at her army surplus boots, fixing her gaze there as if to signal that she was unwilling to participate further and kicking up the dust into little clouds of gloom.

Paul was struggling now, but determined to persist, a noble soldier entering the battle. “That’s what Steph said as well.” He paused and looked directly at his wife, as she rolled her eyes and arched her brows as if to say “Don’t bring me into it!”

He coughed uncomfortably and continued, halting and awkward “She’s really against James Bond films. What don’t you like about them? That new one’s meant to be pretty good.. different...errr... different from the usual ones.”

Annie looked up at the two of them and weighed them up, her disdainful glance flickering over them as she curled her lip in disgust. Without a shadow of a doubt, and with the confidence only possessed by the very young, she considered them to be not only ancient but also unbearably dull.

Taking a sharp intake of breath, Steph dismissed Paul’s pathetic attempts at conversation in a simple and devastating statement.

“James Bond is just...ridiculous!”

Paul was now getting into his stride and, like a dog with a particularly juicy bone, wasn’t ready to let this one go.

“Why is it ridiculous?” he queried, sensing a hard-won victory in his sights.