

Prologue

July 1938

Cadi sat in front of her bedroom window admiring the lace roses her mother had painstakingly sewn onto her white cotton dress. The Williamses were a coal-mining family, so by no means had they the money to splash out on a new dress or even material, but Cadi's mother Jill, who was an excellent seamstress, had used her skills to make a dress out of sheets that she had bought from a jumble sale. Determined to make sure her daughter's dress was perfect, she had stayed up late every night sewing each delicate stitch by candlelight and hiding any imperfections with the lace roses she had made from old doilies.

The day of the fete had arrived and Jill had pinned her daughter's fair hair into place, so that the crown of roses would sit perfectly when Lady Houghton inaugurated her later that day.

'This is your day, my darling child, and you are going to be the best Rose Queen the people of Rhos have ever seen,' cooed Jill as she stood back to admire her daughter.

As Cadi was the youngest of the four siblings *and* the only girl, this date had been marked on the Williamses' calendar for many months, and expectations were high. Especially with her father, Dewi, who couldn't wait to see his daughter take pride of place in the parade.

Alun, the youngest of her three brothers, suddenly appeared from around the side of the curtain that separated Cadi's part of the bedroom from her brothers'. He blew a low whistle. 'Blimey! Who'd've thought such a skinny little wretch could scrub up so well?' He winked at his mother. 'You must have a magic wand hidden somewhere.' He chuckled, before being instructed to 'get out' by both Cadi and her mother.

'He's only teasing, Cadi,' said Jill as she held up a mirror for Cadi to inspect her appearance. 'You know what boys are like.'

Twisting her head from side to side in order to see her hair from all angles, Cadi smiled at her reflection. 'I certainly do, and I hope you see what I mean about needing a room of my own. Alun didn't even call out, Mam – I could've been in my vest and knickers, or even starkers, for all he knew!'

'I don't know what you want us to do, darling, because we can't afford to rent a bigger house.' She looked around the musty-smelling room. 'We can barely afford this one.'

'I don't mean to moan, and I know you and Dad work all the hours you can – the boys too – I just wish ...'

'I know, sweetheart, but it won't be for ever,' assured her mother. 'You'll be moved out and married with kiddies of your own one of these days.'

'I'm only fifteen, Mam! I've years ahead of me yet, and I'm not even certain I want kids.' She rolled her eyes. 'Knowing my luck, they'd all be boys.'

A man's voice yelled out to them from the bottom of the stairs; it was her father. 'Are you two going to stay up there all day?'

Jill called back, 'Coming.' She smiled at her daughter, who stood in front of the window, a shaft of sunlight emphasising her silhouette. 'You wait till your father sees you – he'll be that proud.'

She opened the door and they descended the stairs to where Dewi and Cadi's brothers stood waiting. Cadi blushed as her father nodded approvingly. 'By God, we'll have to fight them off with sticks.'

Pleased to see that the rain had eased off and the sun was breaking through the clouds, Cadi started as a familiar voice called out from behind, 'Let's have a look at you then ...'

Beaming, Cadi turned to greet her best friend and neighbour, Poppy Harding. Holding the sides of her skirt, she pulled them out so that Poppy could marvel at the detail of her dress.

'You look beautiful,' breathed Poppy. Stepping forward, she linked her arm through Cadi's. 'We'd best get a move on, there's a lot of folk waiting for their queen to open the fete.'

The Rose Queen Fete was a special day in the Rhos calendar, and everyone who could do so attended. It was a chance for people to let their hair down and forget about work. The girls would wear their finest dresses, and the boys would be on the lookout for a future wife. Deals would be done, new friendships

made and old ones strengthened. Cadi would be seen by people from miles around, something that was very unusual when you lived in such a rural area.

Being a mining village, Rhos was normally a rather drab and dowdy place, but today the houses were adorned with bunting, and baskets of flowers hung outside the village hall and local pub.

‘They should do things like this more often,’ mused Cadi as they passed her old school, which had also been festooned with decorations. ‘It really brightens the place up.’

‘Stuff like this costs money, and Rhos isn’t wealthy, like Wrexham or Chester.’

‘Or Liverpool ...’ added Cadi.

‘Be fair! Liverpool’s a big, important city with a huge port; even Wrexham and Chester can’t compete with the likes of a city with that kind of status.’

‘I know, I’m just saying it would be nice,’ said Cadi. She glanced towards Rhos mountain, which loomed in the distance. In some respects she was lucky to live deep in the heart of the countryside, but to Cadi the mines ruined everything. You couldn’t escape the coal dust, which seemed to invade every part of daily life, whether you worked down the mine or not; as for the slag heaps, they were a horrible blot that marred the landscape. She said as much to Poppy.

‘It’s like they say – coal’s a dirty old business, which is why I’m amazed your mam’s managed to keep that dress so pristine. It’s whiter than a cloud. As for the detail,’ she gently ran her finger over one of the many roses that adorned the dress, ‘your mam’s a genius when it comes to her sewing. I reckon she’s good

enough to work in one of them high-end shops you was on about, last time you came back from Liverpool.'

Cadi nodded knowledgeably. 'Me too – certainly too good to be working for peanuts, but people in Rhos can't afford to pay good money, so Mam ends up burning both ends of the candle to make ends meet.'

'You're very lucky to have someone so talented in your family,' enthused Poppy. 'No one would ever guess your dress had once been used as a sheet. And coal dust aside, how she managed to keep it free from mould, in a house what's riddled with damp, is more than I'll ever know. Hats off to your mam is all I can say.'

'Mam's been wonderful,' agreed Cadi. 'She made a sort of bag with the leftover bits of sheet. Every time she'd finished doing her alterations, she'd pop it in that and tuck it away in the back of her wardrobe.' She gingerly patted her normally unruly bob. 'As for my hair, I've Mam to thank for that too. She's worked so hard, Poppy. I'd never have managed it without her.'

'Mind you, she's had a good muse in you,' said Poppy. 'When I was Rose Queen my poor old mam had the devil's own job making me look half decent.'

A picture of Poppy as Rose Queen entered Cadi's mind. As she was considerably stouter than Cadi, the dress had not been kind.

Cadi shot her friend a reproving glance. 'Don't be so hard on yourself; what with those big blue eyes of yours, and your sleek black hair, you were simply stunning when you were the Rose Queen – everyone said so.'

Poppy squeezed Cadi's arm. 'And that's why you're my best pal, Cadi Williams, cos you always know the right thing to say.'

As they approached the back of the stage, Cadi placed her hand to her tummy, which was fluttering with anticipation. She nodded to a man with a clipboard who had beckoned for her to step forward. She smiled nervously at Poppy. 'Wish me luck.'

Poppy kissed her on the cheek. 'Good luck.'

The crowd of people who had been chattering amongst themselves fell silent as Lady Houghton delicately placed the crown of roses onto Cadi's head, whilst announcing her to be the new Rose Queen. Cadi blushed to the tips of her ears as the crowd erupted into spontaneous applause, and just when she thought she couldn't feel any more embarrassed, a couple of boys in the throng wolf-whistled their approval, causing her colour to deepen.

As the crowd quietened down, Lady Houghton declared the fete open, and people began to drift off to the various stalls.

'So,' said Poppy as she stepped onto the stage beside her friend, 'how does it feel to be the Rose Queen?'

Cadi sighed happily. 'Wonderful. Deep down, I was dreading all the attention, but it's really quite pleasant.'

Poppy laughed. 'Especially when the fellers show their approval, eh?'

Lowering her gaze, Cadi tried to swallow her smile. 'Not necessarily. Besides, it's uncouth.'

'Uncouth my eye!' grinned Poppy. 'I saw your face when them lads whistled.'

'I suppose it's better than the alternative,' said Cadi.

Poppy gently smoothed one of the lace roses on Cadi's dress. 'Your mam's so talented – this is much

better than a new dress. I don't know why you ever thought people would poke fun.'

Cadi touched a couple of stray curls, which had escaped their pins and were now hanging just above her jawline. 'Because my dress is made out of sheets, and Cindy Holland's dress was made out of taffeta. Not only that, but you know what my hair can be like: half the time I look like I've been dragged through a hedge backwards. No matter how hard I try to make my curls behave, they have a life of their own. Quite frankly, I'm surprised I didn't wake up with a face full of pimples.'

Poppy gave her friend a wry smile. 'Cindy Holland fell lucky with her dress cos her sister works in the city. As for you breaking out in spots, I've never seen so much as a blemish on them fair cheeks of yours, never mind a pimple.'

'Like I say, it'd be just my luck. Besides, we all know that if summat's going to go wrong, it'll be me that gets it in the neck.'

Poppy furrowed her brow in confusion, until the penny dropped. 'You're not still harping on about that business with Aled Davies, are you?'

Cadi folded her arms across her chest. 'Yes, I jolly well am! That boy tried to run me over in his honking great tractor, and it's not the first time he's tried to hurt me, neither. Remember when he pulled the chair away as I was about to sit down?' She rubbed her coccyx as she recalled the incident.

Poppy hid her smile behind the palm of her hand. Aled Davies was the son of the local farmer, and he was considered by most to be quite the catch. Cadi, however, had him down as a big-head who believed

himself better than everyone else, something that she now affirmed.

‘I’m glad he’s not bothered coming today because he’d probably do something to ruin it for me.’ She fell into quiet contemplation before adding, ‘Like he always does.’

Poppy gave a shrewd smile. ‘I really believe he didn’t know you were about to sit down when he took that chair away; he wasn’t even looking in your direction – just like when he drove past with the tractor.’

‘Balderdash!’ snapped Cadi irritably. ‘That boy knows exactly what he’s doing. He simply feigns ignorance so that he can pretend it was an accident.’

Believing in fairness, Poppy cut Cadi short. ‘I was there both times, and the first time, Aled was talking to one of his teachers—’

Cadi cut across her. ‘Swot!’

Sighing, Poppy continued, ‘With his hand resting on the back of the chair, he had no idea you were about to sit down because he wasn’t looking at you, and it was the same when he drove past with the tractor – he was busy looking where he was going and it’s just a shame he didn’t see the puddle ...’

‘Puddle?’ cried Cadi. ‘I’d hardly call manure that’s fallen off the back of the muck-spreader a puddle.’

Poppy grimaced. ‘At least he stopped to apologise.’

Cadi folded her arms across her chest. ‘I never heard Aled apologising, and neither did you. You couldn’t have, because he was laughing too hard.’

Poppy turned away as she tried desperately to straighten her face. Poor Cadi had been engulfed in the manure, and unfortunately the overall effect had left

her looking rather comical. 'You must admit it was a little bit funny, and you did get the day off school.'

'That's as may be, but it doesn't take away from the fact that Aled's a mean, spoilt, spotty little oik.'

Tutting, Poppy wagged a reproving finger. 'Spotty little oik? That's not like you, Cadi. Besides, he must be getting on for six foot, so I'd hardly describe him as little.'

'He brings out the worst in me,' pouted Cadi. 'It's the way he struts around like he's the cock of the walk.'

Laughing, Poppy shook her head. 'Honestly, Cadi, how your father ever hopes to marry you off to that boy, I'll never know.'

Cadi's eyes widened. 'Me neither! Dad's convinced the pair of us make a good match – as is Aled's father, by all accounts. I thought arranged marriages went out with the Ark, but that's my dad all over, stuck in the past. Mam too, come to that.'

Poppy frowned. 'I wasn't aware they'd arranged your marriage ...'

Cadi grumbled irritably. 'May as flamin' well have done, the way they carry on.' She rolled her eyes. 'Every time Dad talks about Aled, it's to tell me how lucky I am to have a boy like him interested in me. All I can say is: he's a damned funny way of showing it.'

She cast her mind back to the day that the incident with the tractor and the manure had taken place. She had been standing in the parlour of their terraced house, gingerly removing her clothing.

'I'm sure it was an accident, it's as plain as the nose on your face how much that boy likes you,' said Dewi. 'You should count yourself a very lucky girl to have

someone of his standing taking an interest in you, it's not like he hasn't got his pick of the crop.'

'If that's how he shows his interest, then he can sodding well pick someone else,' Cadi said as she gathered her manure-ridden clothes into a bundle.

'I'm sure he didn't mean it, luv,' said her mother. 'Your father's right: accidents do happen.'

'But why do they always happen to me?' whined Cadi as she half skipped, half hopped across the earthen floor to the small stove where her mother stood, wooden tongs in hand, waiting to place Cadi's filthy clothes into a large pan of boiling water.

Arching his brow, Cadi's father turned to Arwel, the eldest of his three sons. 'Tell your sister: if a boy picks on a girl, it's only for one reason.'

'So you admit he's picking on me,' said Cadi, her teeth chattering with the cold. 'Well, if he wants my attention, he can find a better way than covering me in—'

'Cadi!' squeaked her mother. 'Mind what you say.' She scowled at her husband and son, who were both laughing raucously. 'Stop encouraging her.'

'She's right though,' chuckled Arwel. 'I can smell her from here.'

Coughing into his hand, Dewi composed himself. 'I've told you before, I've seen the way Aled looks at you when you're all stood waiting for the bus.' He placed a blanket around his daughter's shoulders. 'He can't keep his eyes off you. Quite frankly, that bus could pass him by and he wouldn't notice.'

'Probably hatching his next plan,' muttered Cadi, adding sulkily, 'I don't see why he bothers going to

school, considering that he reckons he knows it all already.'

Her mother gave a derisive laugh. 'For goodness' sake, Cadi, the boy offered to help you with your homework because he wanted an excuse to spend time with you.'

'Well, he needn't have bothered,' snapped Cadi. 'I don't need the help of any man – never have, never will.'

Her father rolled his eyes in exasperation. 'I'm surprised you've got the attention of any feller with an attitude like that.'

'Good! Because I don't want the attention of *any* feller, rich or otherwise,' muttered Cadi. She glanced at her mother, who had resumed her sewing beside the table. She loved her mother with all her heart, but she had no desire to end up working from dusk to dawn for little to no money, whilst forever trying to keep her home free from damp and coal dirt, with no heat or hot water, and all because she'd married a miner. No. If that's what marriage brought you, she would rather stay single for the rest of her life.

Now, as she stood up from the gold-painted wooden throne, she held her hand out for Poppy. 'Come on, they'll be announcing the winner of the Most Beautiful Baby competition in a minute, and I have to be there to hand over the prize.'

'You don't even like babies.'

Cadi hastily hushed her friend into silence as they approached the stage being used for the competitions. 'I can always pretend. Besides, I don't mind them if they're not covered in sick and smelling—'

'Like you did, the day Aled drove by,' quipped Poppy.

Shooting her a withering glance from over her shoulder, Cadi forced her lips into a smile as she left her friend to join the mayor.

After the photographer had taken a picture of Cadi handing over the prize to the mother, who was beaming with pride, Cadi returned to Poppy.

'I've got to go and help judge the beauty contest, are you coming?'

'Of course. I don't intend missing out on a single minute of my best pal's special day.'

Cadi linked her arm through Poppy's. 'Pity it's only for one day.'

'That's why you have to make the most of it,' said Poppy, 'and lap up all the attention because, according to me mam, you won't feel like this again until your wedding day.'

'Living where we do, we're lucky we even get that,' conceded Cadi.

In between judging the various competitions the girls managed to visit some of the stalls, trying their hand at both hoopla and the coconut shy; and it was here that Aled finally put in an appearance.

Seeing him standing in line behind her, Cadi took extra care with her aim, determined to be successful, and was annoyed when her last ball refused to make contact with the coconut.

Taking his turn, Aled flashed a smile at Cadi, who was trying to steer Poppy away. 'Going so soon? If you stick around, I can show you how it's done.'

Cadi heaved a withering sigh. 'I'd rather ...' She fell silent as they all watched the first coconut fall from its perch.

Aled grinned smugly at her as he juggled his next ball between his hands. 'It's all in the aim.'

Pulling Poppy away, Cadi waited until they were out of earshot before hissing, 'Can he really get any more obnoxious?'

Poppy shrugged. 'It's not his fault he's good at it.'

'But the way he gloats,' insisted Cadi, 'you heard him.'

Poppy look back at Aled with an air of uncertainty. 'Was he gloating or giving advice?'

Cadi rolled her eyes. 'It's the way he does it, like he's showing off.'

Aled had his arms around a young girl as he helped her perfect her aim. 'Perhaps he's just very confident?' hazarded Poppy.

'Cocky,' said Cadi simply, as she turned to follow Poppy's gaze. 'I remember the time he offered to help me with my homework. Mam reckons it was so that he could spend time with me, but she wasn't there when Aled asked. He was really patronising, like I was some sort of dunce who couldn't add two plus two.'

Poppy looked up. 'What homework was this?'

There was a long pause before Cadi finally admitted that it had been her maths homework.

'But you were always dreadful at maths,' said Poppy. 'Same as me. If I were you, I'd've jumped at the chance.'

'If it were anyone else, I probably would've, but not *him* – he only offered to help so that he could lord it over me.'

Seeing Aled standing with his hands in his trouser pockets, laughing at those who missed the coconuts, Poppy spoke thoughtfully. 'I'll grant you he's a bit of

a show-off, and he is a little big-headed, but aren't most boys?'

'Not my brothers,' said Cadi.

'But ...' Poppy tried to counteract Cadi's comment, but her friend was speaking the truth.

'You always try to see the good in everyone,' said Cadi, 'which is a truly endearing quality, but you're wasting your time when it comes to Aled.'

'I just want everyone to get along,' reasoned Poppy.

'Everyone else does,' said Cadi simply. 'And if Aled ever gets down off that high horse of his, things might be different, but I can't see that happening somehow.'

'People change as they grow up – I'm sure Aled won't be any different.' Poppy looked around the rest of the stalls, some of which were beginning to pack up. 'Come on, we'd best get a move on before everything's gone.'

It was much later that evening when the girls returned to their homes. Reluctantly Cadi had taken the dress off and hung it up in the back of her wardrobe, before she joined her family at the dinner table.

'Your Majesty,' said Alun, making a low bow.

'Tell him to stop being silly, Mam,' snapped Cadi, but everyone, including her mother, was chuckling. She glanced at the faces around the table, all of which were staring at the top of her head. Reaching up, she gently pulled the crown down and handed it to her mother with an embarrassed smile.

'I'll pop a couple of the roses between the pages of the encyclopaedia, as a keepsake,' said Jill.

Alun stifled a chuckle as he took the seat next to Cadi's. 'It's not like any of us is ever going to read it.'

Jill shot her son a withering glance as she carefully placed the roses in the middle of the book. 'Wash your hands, young man, and if you'd done a bit more reading, maybe you wouldn't be working down the pit.'

Dewi gripped his spoon in readiness for the stew that his wife was beginning to dole out. 'Your mam's right, you should listen to her.'

'You've worked down the pit your whole life,' objected Alun.

'Aye, cos I had no choice, but that doesn't mean to say I *like* working down the mines.'

With everyone ready, Dewi said grace, before they all tucked into the hearty fare.

Speaking between mouthfuls, Dewi turned his attention to his daughter. 'Beautiful, you were. I shouldn't be surprised if they didn't ask you to be Rose Queen again next year.'

Cadi beamed proudly. 'You know you can only be Rose Queen once, Dad. That's why I made the most of today.'

'Aye, you're right there, cariad, but look on the bright side: at least you've your wedding to look forward to,' he said as he skewered a chunk of potato with his fork.

Cadi let out a protest. 'Honestly, Dad! You're as bad as Mam. I don't even know if I want to get married, but if I do, it won't be for a long time yet.' *And certainly not to Aled*, she added in the privacy of her mind.

Dewi spoke disparagingly. 'What do you mean: you don't even know? What else are you planning on doing, if you aren't going to get wed?'

Sensing an argument brewing, Jill pointed at the platefuls of food. 'Less talking, more eating.'

Using his fingernail, Dewi picked a piece of mutton out from between his teeth. 'I don't see what's so bad about getting hitched. It's not like you're going to do anything else with your life.'

'Who says?' snapped Cadi irritably. 'I'm not going to work in the bakery for ever. I want more out of life than that. I want to do summat meaningful, a job where I get to call the shots, instead of being told what to do all the time.' Glancing at her mother, she felt a blush bloom on her cheeks. 'Look at Mam! Working all hours, and never any real recognition for her work; she deserves much better, but she won't get that working round here.'

'What do—' Alun began, but Jill had had enough.

'I didn't spend all that time preparing scrag end for it to go cold, so quit your mithering and get on with your supper,' adding as an afterthought, 'For the record, I'm happy with my lot, Cadi Williams. It may not be your cup of tea, but it suits me fine.'

For the next few minutes the room was silent, apart from the sound of spoons and forks scraping against the plates. When they had finished their supper, the men headed down to the pub whilst Cadi helped her mother collect the empty dishes.

'I'm not saying there's anything wrong with what you do, Mam, far from it. It's just not for me. I want a bit of excitement in my life, and a job where people respect me.'

With her hands covered in soapsuds, her mother itched her forehead with the back of her hand. 'Has all this come about because of today?'

'Not entirely, no. I've always known I wanted more out of life. I suppose you could say today simply confirmed it.'

Jill passed her daughter a plate to dry. 'I admire your gumption, but I think you may have difficulty finding what you're searching for.'

'I don't expect to be treated like a queen every day,' said Cadi, 'but I do want to feel like I matter, and I liked it when people asked for my judgement in the beauty contest. It made me feel important, and I want more of that.' She gazed wistfully at the plate she was drying. 'I want people to look up to me and value my opinion.'

Her mother carried the dishwater out of the back door and emptied it down the drain before coming back in. 'Sounds very much like the role of a mother to me.'

Cadi loved her mam and was keen not to upset her. 'Being a mother is a very important role, but not the one for me. I want to do something different – break away from the norm, pave my own way in life, be responsible for myself. Is that really so bad?'

Wiping her hands dry on her apron, Jill placed the cutlery in the drawer. 'Not at all, if you're a man ...' She wagged a chiding finger as her daughter made to protest. 'You may not like it, Cadi, but that's the long and short of it: we live in a man's world, and it's men what call the shots, not women.' She smiled kindly. 'Do you have any idea how hard it would be for a woman to take on the role of a man?'

'I only want a small piece of it,' said Cadi. 'There must be something a woman can do without a man's say-so?'

'If there is, then I've yet to hear about it – apart from being an actual queen, of course.' She gave her daughter a calculating stare. 'Tell you what, though, if there is

summat out there, I reckon you'll be the one to find it; be damned good at it too, I shouldn't wonder.'

'Thanks, Mam. It's nice to know someone has a bit of faith in me.'

Jill removed her pinny and hung it up by the stove. 'Your father loves you with all his heart, but he's very old-fashioned when it comes to marriage and a woman's role in the world. As far as he's concerned, a woman's place is by the sink whilst the man goes out to earn a wage.'

A line creased Cadi's brow. 'Then why doesn't he object to you working as a seamstress?'

Jill laughed. 'Because he's no choice! In case you hadn't noticed, miners don't make a lot of money. We barely scrape by as it is, which is why he's so keen for you to marry Aled. He knows you wouldn't have to struggle like the rest of us.'

'Only I don't need to marry in order to have a comfortable life,' said Cadi firmly. 'And I'm going to prove that to him if it's the last thing I do, just you wait and see.'

Her mother lifted a chiding eyebrow. 'And how do you intend to do that whilst living in Rhos?'

A picture of Rhos formed in Cadi's mind. The damp and dismal house she lived in, the slag heap that she could see from her bedroom window, and the rows of identical stone houses that she passed on her way to work in the bakery. Her mother was right: there was nothing for her in Rhos. She turned to face her mother, half a smile forming on her lips. 'I don't, which is why I'm going to leave.'

Chapter One

July 1939

A year had passed since Cadi's reign and, despite her intentions, she still worked down the bakery alongside Poppy. Much to her annoyance, it seemed that her father had been correct when it came to the life choices of a girl from a small village, and leaving for pastures new had proved easier said than done, when you had nothing to go to. Although this hadn't dampened Cadi's desire to break free from the norm and, with rumours of war spreading fast, she thought she could see a way out of her humdrum existence.

She flourished a flier that she had picked up from the post office. 'Serve in the WAAF with the men who can fly! That's what it says here, and look, Poppy, look at her uniform, isn't that the smartest thing you've ever seen? She represents the sort of woman I aspire to be,' said Cadi as she waited for Poppy to fasten her coat. 'This is the perfect opportunity for us to get out of Rhos and see a bit of the world.'

'I'm sure you're right, and I'm all for it, but you wanted to be your own boss and you'd be far from

that in the ATS or the WAAF, or whichever service it is you want to join. They'd be telling you when to get up, when to eat, when to go to sleep: more rules and regulations than you can poke a stick at,' reasoned Poppy.

'True,' mused Cadi, 'but we'd also be living away from home with a whole gaggle of other girls, doing a variety of different jobs, not like the bakery, where it's the same old thing, day in, day out.' She paused for thought. 'My auntie drove lorries in the last lot, I don't see why we couldn't do summat like that. Just think of it, Poppy, we'd get to drive all over the country. Imagine that? My dad's nigh on sixty and he's never so much as driven a car.'

Poppy belted her mackintosh and the girls bade their workmates goodbye before heading for home. 'It certainly would be something, but we can't guarantee we'd get a job as drivers. Knowing our luck, we'd end up peeling spuds in the NAAFI and, quite frankly, I'd rather be here baking buns than doing that.'

Feeling the drizzle begin to fall, Cadi opened up her broolly and put it over her and Poppy. 'The armed forces are huge. We could end up doing any manner of jobs – maybe chauffeuring pilots or even the prime minister. There's plenty of roles we can do that you don't need an education for.' An image of girls in the smart blue uniform of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force entered her mind. 'The most important thing is that we'd have our freedom,' she said. 'We'd be able to go to dances, with no ...' She pulled a grumpy face and began to wag her finger in a disapproving fashion, as she imitated her father, 'Where do you think you're going? And you can get that muck off your face!'

A giggle escaped Poppy's lips as she recalled the time she and Cadi had decided to do their own hair and make-up for the flannel dance. 'We did rather plaster it on, so I could sort of see his point, but I don't think we did too badly, considering it was our first attempt.'

'Exactly. We weren't used to it,' said Cadi, 'and our mams didn't think we looked that bad, although mine did say we might have been a bit heavy-handed with the rouge.'

Poppy laughed. 'We looked like we'd done a marathon.'

'It's all part of growing up,' concluded Cadi, 'we all have to learn by our mistakes, but my dad would rather I never went anywhere or did anything.' She gazed dreamily at the hedgerows thick with an array of cow parsley, violets, harebells and foxgloves. 'If we join up, we'll be able to go to the cinema, cafés, dances, shopping – anything and everything – because we'll have no parents to stand in our way.'

Poppy's brow rose. 'And what about the corporal or sergeant, or whoever it is that would be in charge of us? Don't you think they'd have a say in what we did and when we did it? I can't see them letting us wander off, willy-nilly.'

'Granted, but we would get some free time and it would be ours to spend as we pleased, not like at home.'

'You make it sound idyllic,' said Poppy, adding, 'just like they do in that flier you've got, *especially* the ones for the WAAF: beautiful women in smart uniforms smiling away, all happy like they haven't got a care in the world, but I can't see life in the services being that easy. From what I've heard, they're really strict, with

all sorts of rules and regulations, so we could be jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire.'

'I know it wouldn't be all fun and games, but we'd be free, independent from our parents and learning lots whilst we're about it,' insisted Cadi.

Poppy, ever the voice of reason, levelled with her friend. 'Even if what you're saying is right, we're both sixteen and I'm pretty sure that's too young to join up.'

Cadi tapped the tip of her forefinger against the side of her nose. 'I've been doing a bit of digging and, from what I can gather, the ones doing the recruiting don't take too close a look at your credentials, if you follow my meaning ...' Seeing the blank look on Poppy's face, she elaborated, 'They turn a blind eye to folk that've altered the date on their birth certificates and—' She got no further.

Poppy was wagging a reproving finger. 'You can stop right there. I'm not forging my birth certificate for no one.' She rolled her eyes. 'My mam'd go bonkers if she found out!'

Cadi looked horrified. 'We wouldn't *tell* our parents what we'd done, or of our intentions, come to that.'

'Don't you think they'd want to know why we wanted our birth certificates? Cos I don't keep mine tucked under me pillow, and I very much doubt you do, either.' She shook her head dismissively. 'Rhos is a small village and if we were to turn up at the recruiting office, I'd bet a pound to a penny we'd know the feller taking folk on, and they wouldn't need to see our certificates to know we was lying about our age.'

Cadi hadn't thought this far ahead, but ever one to think on her feet, she quickly rallied. 'My auntie – the

one who drove lorries in the last war – lives in Liverpool. If we went to stay with her, we could sign up whilst we were there. As for our certificates, I know where mine's kept, and I'm sure you do too, and I very much doubt anyone would notice they'd gone missing.'

'And if they accept us? What do we say to our parents?'

Cadi grinned. 'Does it matter? Because by then it'll be too late for them to do anything about it.'

Poppy looked doubtful. 'Do you really think we could get away with it?'

Cadi shrugged. 'We'll never know unless we try, but if we don't, we'll end up baking bread until we wed, and I'd rather take my chances trying to sign up. That's even if we go to war, because there's still a chance we might not.'

'True,' conceded Poppy. 'I'm just not happy with the thought of lying about our intentions.'

As they approached the row of terraced houses, Cadi pulled Poppy to a halt. 'You can keep on living in a cramped two up, two down with the rest of your brothers and sisters, or you can join the services and have your own bed. I know I've had enough of sharing a room with my brothers, but at least I don't have to share a bed with them.'

Poppy instantly made up her mind. 'When you put it that way, I guess you can count me in. Only *not* the ATS, as their uniforms are awful *and* they're more like the fellers in the Army, and I'm not walkin' round in heavy boots and trousers for anyone.'

Cadi smiled. 'I don't think it's quite like that, Poppy.' 'Oh? And how do you know?'

'You know as well as I do that a woman isn't allowed to hold a gun or do any actual fighting. We have the nicer roles, like ferrying officers around and ...' She hesitated, because in truth she only knew what she'd heard on the grapevine or read about in magazines. 'And stuff like that,' she finished rather lamely.

'As long as you're not getting your hopes up too much,' warned Poppy.

With the drizzle turning heavy, Cadi pulled Poppy further under the umbrella. 'As long as I get away from Rhos, I don't much care what I end up doing,' she admitted, 'because anything's going to be better than the bakery.'

'It'll certainly be an adventure,' agreed Poppy.

Cadi smiled. She had won Poppy over. All she had to do now was hope that their parents would allow them to visit her auntie.

'So let's see if I've got this right,' said Dewi, his tone heavy with sarcasm. 'The same day Chamberlain announces we're at war with Germany, you decide you want to go and visit your mam's sister – a woman you've not seen for years – just "because"?' He cast his wife a withering glance. 'Your daughter must think I came down in the last shower! We all know why she's going, and your sister won't waste any time before filling Cadi's head with all kinds of fanciful rubbish.' Seeing the stern look cross his wife's face, he hesitated. 'Did you know about this?'

Jill held up her hands in a placatory manner. 'No, I did not. This is as much news to me as it is to you, and

I'd appreciate it if you didn't speak ill of our Flo because of this. It's hardly her fault the girls want to visit.'

Cadi's heart dropped, as she hadn't wanted to cause friction between her parents. 'Please don't argue. I just thought it would be nice to see her, and I could show Poppy where Mam grew up,' adding as a further incentive, 'she's never been to a city before.'

Dewi glared at his wife. 'Maybe not, but surely you wouldn't want them staying with *her*?'

Jill looked from Cadi to Dewi, her jaw twitching in a defensive manner. 'I'd rather she stayed with Flo than someone we don't know.'

Dewi's brow shot towards his hairline. 'Have you taken leave of your senses? We all know your Flo's got no sense of responsibility. I dread to think of the trouble our Cadi could get into, if she stayed with Flo.' He tutted grumpily. 'I wouldn't trust your sister to look after a dog, never mind a child.'

'Dad!' cried Cadi.

Jill bristled. 'There's no need to get nasty when it comes to Flo; she's never done you any harm.'

Dewi gave a loud 'harrumph' before falling silent. He glared accusingly at his daughter through narrowing eyes. His wife might not see past their daughter's façade, but Dewi could, and he was determined to winkle the truth out of Cadi. 'Let's hear it then, lady, and it'd better be good, if you think I'm going to agree to let you go gallivanting halfway across the country.'

Cadi crossed her fingers behind her back. 'They've all been talking about the Great War in work, and I remembered Auntie Flo saying she'd been in the first

lot. I was telling them how she'd been a driver, and I thought it might be nice to go for a visit.'

He rolled his eyes. 'I *knew* it. You want to follow in your auntie's footsteps.'

Cadi feigned innocence. 'What makes you say that?'

'Because I'm not stupid. A blind man could see your intentions, even if your mam can't.'

'Mam's got nothing to do with this,' snapped Cadi. 'This was my idea, and I don't see why you're being so ill-tempered. How you can say Auntie Flo is irresponsible, when she works for the government, is beyond me.'

'Cos they don't know her like I do,' growled Dewi. He rubbed his face between his hands before regarding his daughter from over the top of steepled fingers. 'To decide that you want to go and visit a relative you barely know, when there's a war on, is idiotic. You've made it clear that you think you're too good to stay in Rhos, and this is the perfect opportunity for you to break free – or it would be if you were eighteen, only you're not, and I don't want you going off on some wild goose chase, with Jerry dropping bombs left, right and centre. If you really want to visit your auntie, you can wait until the war's over.' Leaning back in his chair, he picked up his paper and continued reading.

Cadi's mother gave her daughter an encouraging nod.

Cadi cleared her throat, regaining her father's attention. 'We've no idea how long the war will last. I know I'm not eighteen, but I do earn my own wages, and I have my own money. If I want to go and visit Auntie Flo, then I shall. Everyone knows Hitler will focus on

London, so I'm sure we'll be perfectly safe.' Her heart raced in her chest as the paper remained in front of her father's face. She waited for a second or two, but her father wasn't responding. 'Dad?'

Dewi folded down the top half of his paper and stared at Cadi, stony-faced. 'What?'

Cadi's words caught in her throat, but she was determined not to back down, not now. 'Did you hear what I said?'

His jaw flinched. 'How could I not hear you, when you're stood not more than two feet away from me?' He threw his wife a backward glance. 'I must say I'm surprised your mother has nothing to say on the matter, especially when you've just proved your naivety by saying that Hitler won't bomb Liverpool, because he will – it's a port, and a busy one to boot.'

Jill laid a reassuring hand on her husband's shoulder. 'Our Cadi's a sensible lass and despite what you've said, you know our Flo wouldn't let them come to any harm.'

'Beats me how you can say that with a straight face,' said Dewi. He gave a discontented snort before disappearing back behind the pages of his newspaper.

After another long pause Cadi tried again. 'Is that it?'

Sighing heavily, Dewi folded his paper and placed it on his knee. 'What do you want me to say? You've made your feelings perfectly clear, and it's obvious you don't give a damn what I think. So why should I waste my breath trying to talk sense into you, when you've clearly made your mind up?'

'I *do* care,' said Cadi quietly. 'I don't want to hurt or disappoint you, but this is *my* life and ...'

‘And hang the rest of us,’ muttered Dewi. He began to unfold the paper on his lap. ‘If you’ve nothing else to add?’

Cadi got up from the chair and made her way to the door. Pausing momentarily, she spoke thickly through tears that threatened to get the better of her. ‘I didn’t want it to be this way. I wanted your approval – your support even.’

Dewi could hardly believe his ears. ‘You wanted me to condone my daughter running off to Liverpool during a war in order join up? I’d never approve of you doing something like that, especially not at your age; you’re still wet behind the ears, for God’s sake.’ He raised his voice, drowning out Cadi as she started to protest that she would soon be turning seventeen. ‘You’re *my* daughter, and no matter how old you are, you’ll *always* be my child, and I’ll do whatever it takes to protect you. Which is why I won’t be giving you my blessing. Should anyone ask, I shall tell them the truth: that you’re only sixteen. If I can’t talk sense into you, then maybe they can. I’d hope to God your Auntie Flo will have summat to say, but she’s as bad as the rest of you.’ He heaved a sigh. ‘I can’t stop you going, but I’ll be damned if I’ll do anything to help you,’ adding bitterly, ‘unlike your mother.’

‘At least Mam supports me, which is more than I can say for you,’ said Cadi. She hesitated, her hand on the door handle. ‘It’s your fault I lied in the first place. I knew you’d try and stop me from leaving. You expect me to sit in a corner, baking buns, like a good little housewife. Any other father would be proud to think their daughter wanted to do her bit.’

Dewi jumped to his feet. 'Any father worth his salt wouldn't want to see his daughter going like a lamb to the slaughter!' He waved an angry finger under her nose. 'You really try my patience at times, young lady, which is why I have to keep reminding myself that you're barely out of nappies. When you come back—'

Cadi interrupted. 'Come back?'

He gave a short, patronising laugh. 'When you're a woman, you'll—'

Cadi cut him short once more. 'Just because I don't want to kowtow to a man, whilst chained to the kitchen sink, doesn't mean to say I'm not a woman.'

Dewi shot her a withering glance before sitting back down in his chair and disappearing behind his paper. 'Yes, dear.'

Cadi left the room before she said something she couldn't take back. There was no talking to her father once he had made up his mind. She would go to Liverpool and prove to him that she was more than capable of looking after herself. Maybe then he would admit that she wasn't the child he still thought her to be.

She pulled her knitted green shawl around her shoulders and had opened the front door when her mother called out from behind.

'Try not to take any notice of your father,' said Jill as she neatened Cadi's shawl, 'it's only natural he should worry. I'll have a word, see if I can't make him see sense.'

Cadi embraced her mother. 'Thanks, Mam. I thought I'd make myself scarce and see how Poppy got on with her folks, give him a chance to cool down.'

Jill nodded. 'Give me half an hour.'

Leaving her mother to talk to her father, Cadi walked the couple of paces to Poppy's house. Keeping her fingers crossed, she knocked a brief tattoo against the door. If Poppy's parents had denied their daughter passage to Liverpool, Cadi would be on her own, but after the conversation she had just had with her father, she was determined to go, with or without her pal.

The door opened and Poppy's youngest brother, Eifion, greeted her with a jammy smile. "Ello, Cadi, you come to see our Poppy?"

Nodding, Cadi crouched down to Eifion's height and examined his face. 'Let me guess ... jam butties for your tea?'

His cheeks split into an astonished smile. 'How did you know that?'

She fluttered her fingers back and forth. 'Magic!'

Standing back to allow her in, he closed the door behind them. 'Our Poppy's in with me mam and dad. She says you and her's off to the city. Can I come?'

Cadi faltered mid-step, as she hardly wanted to walk in on her friend if things weren't going well. She held out her hand to Eifion and led him halfway up the stairs. 'What's your mam and dad said?'

He looked at her innocently. 'About what?'

'About her going to the city?'

'Oh, that.' He wiped his jammy mouth on his sleeve and looked at the residue. He gave her a shrewd grin. 'Magic, me bum. That's how you knew ...'

Nodding hastily, Cadi placed a finger to her lips. 'You're a clever boy, but this is really important: what did your parents say about the city?'

He shrugged. 'Dunno, cos I come to let you in.'

'Oh,' said Cadi, disappointed that he hadn't heard his parents' reaction.

Eifion looked down the stairs. 'Why are we sittin' 'ere?'

Cadi got to her feet. 'I didn't want to disturb your parents. Maybe it's better if I come back later—' She broke off as they heard the parlour door open.

Poppy's mother called through to her son. 'Who was at the door, Eifion?'

'Cadi,' he said before Cadi could stop him.

Smiling awkwardly, Cadi walked down the stairs and followed Eifion into the parlour. 'Sorry, Mrs H, I didn't want to intrude.'

The older woman raised an accusing eyebrow. 'Mmm, I bet you didn't.'

Cadi glanced anxiously at Poppy, who was sitting between her parents. Poppy winked at her friend. 'Come in, Cadi, Mam's only teasing.'

Cadi entered the parlour, turning to greet each of the Hardings as she did so. She wondered whether Poppy had continued with the ruse of wanting to go and visit Auntie Flo or whether she'd ended up spilling the beans, as Cadi had done.

Mr Harding was stuffing tobacco into the bowl of his pipe. 'I hear you want to whisk our Poppy off to Liverpool?'

Cadi nodded mutely.

'To see if we can join the services,' said Poppy. She glanced apologetically at Cadi.

Giving her friend a reassuring smile, Cadi waited with bated breath to hear the Hardings' thoughts.

Poppy's father lit the pipe and clenched it between his teeth whilst speaking out of the corner of his mouth. 'The village can't offer our Poppy the same opportunities the services can, and God only knows, we could do with the extra space.' He smiled fleetingly. 'What did your folks think of the idea?'

'Mam was all for it, but Dad's digging his heels in. He thinks we're too young, and that it's going to blow up in our faces.'

Mr Harding shrugged nonchalantly. 'We all know your father had his heart set on you and Aled Davies getting wed.'

Cadi rolled her eyes. 'I know he did, but even if I stayed, that would never happen.'

Mrs Harding smiled sympathetically at Cadi. 'I'm sure your father'll come round in time.'

'I hope so, because I'm going and that's all there is to it.'

'You have to lead your life as you see fit,' agreed Mrs Harding

'That's exactly what I told him, not that he liked hearing it,' said Cadi. 'Dad insists I'm still a child, but if that's true, it's only because he treats me like one. If I did as he wished and stayed at home, I'd never grow up.' She nodded tersely. 'If he wants me to act like an adult, then he needs to let me go!'

October 1939

A month had passed since Chamberlain's announcement and the girls had just finished their final shift in the bakery.

'I can't believe you're actually leaving,' said Matilda, one of their co-workers. 'I must say I rather envy

you, but I don't think I'd be brave enough to leave home. You must promise to write and let me know how you're getting on, where you're living, who you've met ...' She waved her hands in an excited fashion. 'Everything!'

Cadi fastened the wooden toggles on her coat as they made their way down the road. 'Will do, and you must fill us in on all the gossip whilst we're away.'

'Soon as I'm eighteen I'm out of here,' said Sophie, a shorthand typist who worked in the office. 'I fancy working for the War Office or something exciting like that.'

'Right in the thick of things,' said Poppy. 'You'd get to hear all the secret plans – you might even meet Chamberlain!'

'I could end up being his personal secretary,' mused Sophie. 'Imagine that.'

'I can't see me getting anything that grand,' said Cadi, 'but as long as I get away from here, I don't care what I end up doing.'

Matilda looked both ways as they reached the fork in the road; from here, she and Sophie would go one way, and Cadi and Poppy the other. 'Time to say cheerio.'

It was a tearful goodbye, with promises to stay in touch and to meet up in the future. The girls had just waved Matilda and Sophie off when they heard a familiar voice hail them from behind.

Cadi's heart sank. 'Why *him*?'

Poppy tucked her arm through Cadi's. 'I'd have thought you'd have enjoyed telling him of your new venture.'

'When you put it like that ...' Cadi beamed smugly as Aled approached.

‘What’s going on?’ said Aled. He nodded his head in the direction of Matilda and Sophie. ‘I saw everyone hugging and kissing. If I didn’t know any better, I’d have thought it an emotional goodbye—’

Eager to be the one boasting, for a change, Cadi cut him short. ‘Then you’d have thought right.’

He looked after the other girls. ‘Oh? Where are they going?’

Cadi frowned. Why did he automatically assume it was Matilda and Sophie leaving and not Poppy and herself? ‘Not them! Us.’

His face fell. ‘*You?*’

Cadi could feel her temper rising. ‘Yes, us! Why is that so hard to believe?’

Ignoring the question, Aled continued speaking. ‘Where are you going?’ adding, ‘Wrexham?’ with a scornful laugh.

‘Liverpool,’ said Poppy complacently.

Aled visibly balked at the idea. ‘Don’t be silly.’

Cadi stamped her foot angrily. ‘We’re not being silly.’

‘Why’d you want to go there?’ He shot Cadi a sharp, patronising look. ‘You do know there’s a war on?’

Thoroughly fed up, and quite frankly insulted by Aled’s response, Cadi spoke her mind. ‘Of course we know there’s a war on – that’s why we’re going, so that we can join up and do our bit.’

Aled stared at her in disbelief, before a smile cracked his lips. The girls were obviously having him on. ‘Pull the other one, it’s got bells on.’

‘We are too,’ said Poppy defiantly, ‘and I think you’re being jolly rude.’

He gaped at the girls. 'You're actually serious?'

'Why wouldn't we be?' snapped Cadi. She had always suspected Aled had a bad opinion of her but hearing it first-hand was proving infuriating.

'Because you're only a couple of kids. What are you? Fifteen? Sixteen? Certainly no more than that. The services are looking for women, not girls. What can you two possibly offer that would be of any use to the war effort?'

'I've just turned seventeen, and Cadi's not far off,' said Poppy. 'Besides, it's no skin off your nose where we go.'

But Cadi had already come up with the answer. She pointed an accusing finger at Aled. 'He's jealous because he has to stay on the farm, up to his knees in pig poo, whilst we get to live it up in the city, going to balls, swanky dances and posh shops.'

Aled spluttered a protest. 'I am *not* jealous. I just find it incredible that you're actually going ahead with this barmy plan.'

Cadi bridled. 'Barmy? *Barmy*? I'd have to be that, to stay here talking to you.' She thrust her arm through Poppy's. 'Come on, Poppy, I've had enough of listening to this rubbish.'

Raising his voice, Aled spoke his mind. 'You'll be back with your tails between your legs, you mark my words. The city's no place for a couple of kids.'

Furious beyond words, Cadi and Poppy marched off.

Poppy shook her head angrily. 'The nerve of that boy! All this time I've been standing up for him, saying he wasn't as bad as you thought him to be.'

Cadi spoke through thin lips. 'I always knew he was a wrong 'un, and he's proved it. Talk about showing your true colours.'

'That he has.' Poppy pulled an apologetic grimace. 'I'm sorry I ever doubted you.'

Cadi put her arm around her friend's shoulders. 'You tried to see the good in him. I can't hang you for that.'

Aled watched as they walked away. How could the girls' parents allow them to trot off to join the war, whilst his own father had point-blank refused even to consider letting him go?

He turned his thoughts to the day of Chamberlain's broadcast. They had been in the kitchen, listening to the wireless with bated breath. As soon as they heard the unthinkable, Aled had announced his intention to join the RAF. He had expected his mother to object, but not his father.

'I can't manage this place on my own, Aled, you know that,' his father had said reasonably. 'I understand that, to a young chap like yourself, war looks very glamorous and exciting, but the truth is far from that. Some would say you're damned lucky to be in a reserved occupation – and I'd be one of them. Far better that you stay on the farm with me and help feed the nation. You'd still be doing your bit, if that's what concerns you.'

Desperate to talk his father round, Aled had quickly come up with a solution. 'Couldn't one of the lads from the village take my place on the farm?'

His father had scoffed at such a suggestion. 'They're not farmers, they wouldn't know where to start.'

Aled raised an eyebrow. 'They'd soon pick it up, and I think I could do really well in the RAF – maybe even air crew.'

But his father had been resolute, and with his mother in tears at the thought of her boy going off to war, Aled had dropped the subject.

Now he turned on his heel. There was no way he was going to watch Cadi and Poppy chase their dreams and not do the same himself. He would talk to his father and make him see sense.

It was the following morning, and Cadi had woken to glorious sunshine flowing through her window. Shading her eyes from the bright light, she wondered what the time was, before remembering that today was the day she and Poppy were leaving for Liverpool. A slow smile spread across her cheeks as she slipped out of bed and went to pick up the ewer, ready to take downstairs; only, to her surprise, someone had half filled it with warm water. Passing the flannel over her skin, she mused that the next time she did this, it would be in Liverpool. Having washed and dressed, she headed down the steep staircase into the kitchen, where her family were already seated round the table eating their breakfast.

Her father was the first to look up from his porridge. 'I'd have thought you'd have been up at the crack of dawn, eager to get away,' he said sulkily.

'It took me a while to get to sleep,' Cadi admitted. 'Arwel was snoring like a pig most of the night.'

Arwel grinned. 'Rubbish! I don't snore.'

'You bloomin' well do,' yawned Alun, 'you were rumblin' away like one of the mine-carts.'

Arwel looked thoughtful. 'Now you mention it, I had a dream I was in one of them carts.'

Jill interrupted her sons' conversation. 'Are you all packed and ready for the off, dear?'

Cadi nodded as she took the empty seat next to her father. 'Not that it took me long, it's not as if I have an awful lot.'

Dylan picked up his empty bowl and took it over to the sink. 'Fancy our little sister leaving for the city. You're a proper grown-up now, Cadi.'

This comment was met with a quiet 'Hmph' from Cadi's father.

'Come on, Dad,' said Dylan. 'Our Cadi's got a sensible head on her shoulders, for her age.'

Dewi folded his arms on the table. 'I used to think so, but I don't call what she's doing sensible, even if you do.'

Dylan rolled his eyes. 'She'll be grand; and if she's not, then she can come home, can't you, Cadi?'

Cadi nodded, but in her heart she knew things would have to go very wrong indeed before she'd even consider returning home.

She looked to Dylan. 'Are you coming to see me off?'

He indicated his brothers. 'Us three have got to go to work, so we'll have to say our goodbyes here.'

As if taking this as their cue to leave, Alun and Arwel got up from the table and placed their dishes in the sink, as they waited their turn to hug their little sister goodbye and wish her well.

Speaking thickly through their embrace, Cadi hugged each of them tightly, promising that she would keep in touch.

‘Don’t forget to mention you’ve three handsome brothers, if you bump into any pretty Waafs,’ said Alun as he placed his cap on his head.

‘I have?’ teased Cadi.

Alun winked at her. ‘All right, just me then.’

The boys left amid a chorus of goodbyes and Cadi looked round the deserted kitchen. ‘It’s so quiet when they’re not here. I’m really going to miss them.’

‘You don’t have to go,’ said Dewi quickly, adding, ‘it’s not compulsory ...’

‘I know it’s not, but if I don’t go now, I never will.’

‘Would that really be so bad?’ said Dewi. ‘I’ve lived my whole life in the village and it’s never done me any harm.’

‘I know, Dad, but I’m not like you. I want to spread my wings, see what’s out there.’ Getting up from her seat, Cadi kissed the top of his head. ‘We’ve been through all this.’

‘I know, but I don’t want you to feel you have to go through with it, to save face.’

‘Don’t worry. I’m doing this because I want to, not because I have to.’

‘And what about Aled?’

She shrugged. ‘What about him?’

‘He’d have made a grand husband: plenty of money – and a home to call your own ...’

She shook her head. ‘That’s always been *your* dream for me, Dad, but it’s not what *I* want.’

They were interrupted by someone knocking a familiar tattoo on the front door.

Cadi grinned. ‘Come in, Poppy.’