

THE EGG COLLECTOR

Sample Chapter
LORELEI

What's for lunch? Rubin wants to know.

I look up at the clock on the wall. It's nine am.

Give it a rest Rubin, I say. You just finished breakfast.

I'm hungry again.

Mum, Claire sidles up to me like a cat, I need black tights for dance on Monday.

What happened to the pair we just bought? Have you checked your floordrobe?

She's the messiest kid I've ever seen, this one. About as messy as me when I was her age.

Did you leave them at your father's?

She shrugs.

Okay, I sigh. We'll go shopping later.

Excellent, Rubin says. Can we do something cool while we're out?

Like what?

Like eat.

And around it goes. Week on, week off, year in, year out. And you love them, of course you love them, but sometimes you do wonder how your life might have been without them, how it would feel to be young and carefree again. Reckless. Irresponsible. They sound like fun words to me right now.

Last night I ran the caravan idea up the flagpole.

I'm going to buy us a caravan to live in, I announce over dinner.

You do realise you have two children, says Mr Straighty-one-eighty.

What's that got to do with it? You'll still have a bed each.

And where did you plan on parking it?

I don't know. In a corner of someone's property. Or maybe we'll hit the road. What do you think of that idea Claire?

Meh, she says unhelpfully.

We still have to go to school you know, Rubin reminds me.

I'll home school you.

Oh great. So much for my grades.

Why? I still know my times tables. And ancient history.

Oh, Mum, Claire laughs. Will you be the teacher or the subject?

And what about all my friends? Rubin says.

What friends? You don't have any.

Now they're both cracking up and it's one of those moments that make up for all the others.

Anyway, think of the rent money we'll save, I continue. We'll be able to go on holidays!

In the caravan? No thanks.

How I ended up with such conservative children I've no clue. But I like the idea of caravan living. And when the kids are through school I can just hitch it up and take off.

I look out over the lake and reconsider. Today it's a sheet of glass under a perfect blue sky. Out front two identical yachts are moored to the same buoy; one right side up and the other upside down, joined together at the waterline. The landlord has been up this week and mowed the lawn to the water's edge – he does the front with his fan-dangled ride-on, I do the back

with my cheap push-me-pull-you – and the grounds look like a manicured estate. From somewhere near birds chatter pleasantly. It's going to be hard to leave this place when the time does come.

Five more years and the kids are off my hands. Sometimes this is the only thing that keeps me going, I swear. Not that I don't love them, of course, but I've made it clear my commitment ends after eighteen years, then they're out the door.

That's a bit mean, Rubin whinged at the time.

You'll be ready, I assured him. I'll make sure you can look after yourselves. In fact you could get some practice with the washing up now if you're worried.

No, I'll be fine thanks, he changed his tune. Just remembered I've got homework.

Then it's your mother's turn to have a life, I told him, knowing he'll be the hardest one to set free. The daughter will be off as soon she can, but Rubin was always clingy, like his father. It always seems to be the boys that need the most mothering. Or is that just because I'm attracted to lost puppies? Heaven forbid I've had enough whatever the reason.

There's a pelican cruising the shallows for fish. It looks stately and free. Rubin's asking me when we can go shopping but I ignore him. I'm watching the pelican. Now Claire says something but I don't respond to her either. The pelican crosses between the yacht and the shore and shatters the upside down image into a thousand shards of glassy water. It's destructive and beautiful in equal measures and it makes me smile.

Then I sigh and turn to attend the kids.