

PAULA

They were quarrelling again about her daughter's decision to leave her husband and set up with Richard and, despite her brother's bellicose manner and his loud protestations Josie was determined, on this occasion at least, to hold her nerve and not be dissuaded by the strength of his argument or the menace in his amplified voice. She'd become inured in recent years to what she regarded as his combative and overbearing nature and, buoyed by her confidence in Richard's unerring devotion to her eldest girl, she was resolute in her decision to stick to her guns and bless their commitment to one another at this evening's family gathering.

She recognised from her brother's manner and in the words he'd used to express his disapproval of the match that his own failed marriage sat heavily on his mind, clouding his judgement, perhaps, and impeding his clarity of thought. Despite the sadness she felt over his personal difficulties, her hackles were up and she was angry and resistant against him, roused by the audacity of his verbal assault on her daughter's moral values. This had been a step too far, she told herself, and she would have no more of it.

She'd set aside the disappointment she felt over Paula's infidelity and given her the unwavering support of a doting mother. What else could she be expected to do? If a marriage was destined to fail, as this one clearly was, what matter if it lasted twenty years or two or, and she had to admit it was an odd thing to contemplate, less than a fortnight, as Paula's had?

The host of expensive presents they'd received from loved ones and well-wishing friends, many of which were still in their wrapping, must all be returned, of course: there was no doubt about it, regardless of Paula's embarrassment and the husband's humiliation. There was nothing else for it; she didn't need her brother to tell her that.