

## *Part One*

The day started well enough for Emily except that she was late.

'Excuse me, excuse me, thank you, excuse me. Oh! You're very kind!'

She beamed at two men who whipped open the double doors of the clinic for her and rushed past, not seeing the look of fear on their faces. It was the huge, tent-like denim maternity trousers that did it, and the way her belly swung wildly from side to side like an uncontrolled missile.

Now. Floor three. Emily paused by the lift. It said 400kgs only. She hadn't been weighed since last week but just to be on the safe side she headed for the stairs. It would be unfair to put the other lift occupants at risk.

'You're late,' Mr Chapman's receptionist said with a little sigh. Her hair looked nailed on. Emily admired it. She'd left half of hers on the pillow that morning. Conor said that soon they would have enough to stuff a duvet.

'Sorry,' Emily said. The thirty-mile drive from

Paulstown to Cork City always took longer than she anticipated.

'I'll see if Mr Chapman can squeeze you in.'

'He did the last time I was late. Squeezed me in. Or should that be squeez?'

The receptionist didn't crack a smile. She never did. Oh well. She was probably only on 15k a year and couldn't afford to smile.

'Are you feeling all right?' she asked instead, looking at Emily.

'Fine. Well, maybe a little dizzy.' Big black dots were bouncing before Emily's eyes. Next time she would definitely take the lift.

'Dizziness tends to happen.' The receptionist nodded sagely. 'You know, when you're pregnant.'

This was rich from a girl who Emily guessed had been on the pill since she was twelve and still double-bagged everything. Emily stealthily reached behind and unzipped her 'roomy' maternity pants. The relief was instant and enormous, and the black dots disappeared.

'Why don't you take a seat,' the receptionist said. 'But as you've missed your appointment, I should warn you that you could have a bit of a wait.'

'That's fine,' Emily said quickly, inching away, but the receptionist had long experience of dealing with the likes of Emily. A long, pale hand shot out over the reception desk.

'Your sample.'

'I forgot it,' Emily admitted.

## *Expecting Emily*

Behind her, she could feel the rest of the women in the waiting-room startle into awareness. Imagine forgetting to bring a sample! When they had probably been up since dawn drinking gallons of mineral water and decaff tea to generate that perfect, precious 10 ml. Some of them had probably used a tea-strainer in an effort at quality control.

The receptionist gave another little sigh.

'Mr Chapman needs a sample from you every week.'

Emily looked at her. 'Why, can't he produce his own?'

'No, no, he needs yours for the tests, you see . . . oh! You're joking. Um, aren't you?'

'I am,' Emily said patiently. Sometimes she wondered why she bothered. But then a tiny snigger escaped the receptionist, before she guiltily covered her mouth with her hand. Nobody laughed at Mr Chapman, the most eminent obstetrician in the whole of the southwest. Some women planned their pregnancies around his holidays.

The receptionist produced a spare plastic sample jar and leaned in. They were co-conspirators now. 'The bathroom's down to your right, Emily.'

'Thanks, ah . . .?'

'Sandra.'

The tiny plastic container defied all reason. Emily did her best but her efforts were as usual more miss than hit. She dried up the bathroom floor with wads of toilet paper and hoped that nobody would notice her damp shoe.

'My God!' A bloated, pasty face suddenly confronted her. 'Oh, it's only me,' she noted sadly, looking quickly away from the bathroom mirror. Once upon a time she had been quite nice-looking.

She carefully washed her hands. Her wedding ring wouldn't budge, she noticed, the skin around it pinched and red. She should have taken it off before it was too late. Now they'd probably have to cut it off.

Still, Conor would buy her an eternity ring, wouldn't he? Wasn't that what men bought their wives on production of the first heir? A little well-done-love, smashing-job – mind you, I'd have done it ten times better myself if I'd had a pair of ovaries.

'Excuse me . . . sorry . . . excuse me.' It was extraordinary how much of her life Emily seemed to spend excusing herself. She squeezed into a corner in the waiting-room and picked through the same tired selection of magazines. All the good ones were gone of course; *Gardener's Monthly* and 1998's copy of *Newsweek* had already been snapped up. Emily opened up *House & Home* and immediately wished she hadn't. The baby's room was only half-painted. She and Conor had spent an hour last night trying to assemble the easy-to-assemble cot. Conor had given up in a near tantrum, vowing to write to the manufacturers. Emily didn't know what that would achieve apart from causing a fuss. Conor had retorted that there would be a greater fuss if the baby fell through the bottom and broke its neck. 'Jesus, Conor!' Emily's knees had snapped

## *Expecting Emily*

together in case the baby might fall through her own bottom. Conor had lugged the cot into the garage. There were sounds of sawing. He'd reappeared, triumphant. 'It's assembled.'

The waiting-room was silent save for the sounds of magazine pages furiously turning. Not that anybody was reading, Emily included. She was watching the woman in the red trouser suit out of the corner of her eye. The woman in the red trouser suit was watching your woman in the baggy jumper. *She* was watching Emily and Trouser Suit simultaneously. And the one in the flowery frock was watching them all, or at least their midriffs. The air of competition was intense. Who had the biggest belly? Who wore the nicest maternity clothes? Whose ankles were the least swollen? And occasionally a smug sense of reassurance – thank God *my* baby won't have a hooter like that.

It had been the same in antenatal classes. Everyone watching each other in a kind of guarded way. And the men were worse! Strutting about, giving each other I've-got-a-functioning-willy looks. It was nonsense really. Surely they were all in this together?

Emily lowered her magazine and leaned in to the woman in the trouser suit. The woman started a bit, her hands flying protectively to her belly.

'How many weeks are you?' Emily enquired politely.

'Thirty-two.'

'Me too.' Emily smiled. 'I'm due the tenth of May.'

'I'm the eleventh!' Trouser Suit was delighted now.

'No!'

'Have you had any Braxton Hicks yet?' Trouser Suit asked eagerly.

Emily looked at her blankly. 'What?'

'You know, the preparatory contractions?'

'Um, no.'

'Oh.'

Emily was losing Trouser Suit – it was happening before her very eyes. 'But I'm hoping for one any minute now.'

'I'm getting quite a few of them,' the girl in the baggy jumper offered shyly.

Trouser Suit's defection was complete. She turned her back on Emily. 'Thank God! I thought I was the only one!'

'They woke me up the other night,' Baggy Jumper confided. 'I thought I was going into labour!'

The woman in the flowery frock just couldn't keep out of it. 'You've a lovely little bump,' she told Baggy Jumper.

'Oh stop! I'm like an elephant!'

'I'm like an elephant!' Flowery Frock cried. 'And I'm only twenty-eight weeks!'

'God, I thought you were nearly full-term,' Trouser Suit said.

Flowery Frock was sorry she'd opened her mouth now. Emily saw her chance to get back into the fray, but Baggy Jumper beat her to it.

'Mr Chapman thinks I'm not putting on enough

## *Expecting Emily*

weight,' she murmured nervously even though everyone could see she was delighted. 'I've to eat more.'

'I ate a whole sliced pan last night,' Trouser Suit sighed.

Emily leaned forward eagerly. 'That's nothing! I had three Aeros and a Galaxy ice cream!'

Baggy Jumper, Trouser Suit and Flowery Frock looked at her in silence.

'Um, all that sugar and additives . . . it mightn't be good for the baby . . .' Baggy Jumper eventually offered.

Emily felt like she had been slapped across the face. She retreated behind her magazine, raging with herself. Why hadn't she said something about the sliced pan? All that gluten! Not to mention the pound of butter that had probably gone with it. But the moment was gone. The women had moved on to various discharges now, discussing colours and textures with glee. And she after starting the bloody conversation too!

She gave her bump a quick, loving pat. At least you won't have ears like hers, she reassured it.

The baby kicked her roundly in the kidneys. You little shit, she thought dispassionately.

Here came the husbands now into the packed waiting-room, having been despatched to park cars, buy mineral water and phone the office. There was much confusion as each tried to get as close as possible to the mother of their child without upsetting the mother of anybody else's child.

'I can scoot over . . .'

'No, no, you're the one who's pregnant.' A nervous laugh.

'I'm not that big.' More laughter.

'Jerry, there's a space over here.'

'Oh right. Excuse me . . . sorry . . .'

Jerry slid in beside Baggy Jumper, relieved, and took her hand as though she were made of bone china. He was no sooner settled before the glass plate at reception flew back.

'Michelle? Jerry? Mr Chapman's ready for you now.'

Baggy Jumper and Jerry exchanged a secret smile before walking down the corridor and into the inner sanctum, him steering her with a firm hand on the small of her back, as though by being pregnant she had also lost her sense of direction.

There was no more chatter in the waiting-room. It was all very well to confide in your womenfolk about eating sliced pans, but not in front of the men. It would have been as tasteless and embarrassing as discussing period pains.

The door opened again and Conor breezed in. Sensibly, he had bought a copy of the *Irish Times* in the shop next door.

He didn't try to squeeze in anywhere. He simply stood by the door, looked at Emily and nodded around easily at everybody.

Emily felt she should speak to him, claim him or something. 'Did you manage to get parking?'

'Yes,' he said. Of course he had. Everybody else had

## *Expecting Emily*

driven around the clinic in circles for half an hour but car parks seemed to swell and open up for Conor.

They had driven down separately. Conor would be working in Cork tonight and figured he would pass the afternoon shopping, rather than making the sixty-mile round trip home and back again.

'Did you?' he asked. 'Get parking?' He had a great interest in these things.

'Oh yes,' Emily said breezily. She had ended up parking in the consultants' car park. She had stuck a note to the windscreen saying 'On a delivery'. She had been quite pleased with that.

'We're going to have a bit of a wait,' she told him. 'Sandra told me.'

Conor's eyebrows jumped up at the cosy reference to Sandra. So, Emily had finally broken down the hard-faced bitch. Conor himself didn't waste his energy on people like that.

'Well, we'll see about that,' he said, throwing a grim look towards reception.

'Conor, please don't make a fuss.' Emily was embarrassed. She hoped he wouldn't trot out his argument in front of everyone – that they paid handsomely for Mr Chapman's time and that it wasn't right to make pregnant women wait around like this.

Thankfully, he didn't. He merely shrugged and opened his paper.

Emily sat back, closed her eyes, and concentrated on the movement in her tummy. The baby was turning

over. She still wasn't quite used to it after all these months. In fact, it was very odd sometimes when she was lying quite still to see her belly bulge and flop over entirely of its own accord. She thought she knew exactly how Sigourney Weaver had felt in *Alien*. Or was it *Alien 2*?

She had confided this to her sister Liz once. Liz had five boys and liked to be consulted for advice.

'My God, Emily, you're not very maternal, are you? Robbie! Get out of that puddle this instant or I'll murder you!'

Emily had felt guilty afterwards. Maybe there was something wrong with her. Surely her maternal instincts, whatever they were supposed to be, would come to the fore once the baby was born? Or was it possible that she was one of those freak mothers who took one look at their new infant and demanded that it be taken away and reared by apes or something?

The baby had gone very still now. Probably frightened out of its wits. Or else, of course, it had just gone to sleep.

Mr Chapman, as usual, wanted to palpate her.

'Conor, there's no reason why you shouldn't see this,' he said generously.

Emily found herself lying on the examining table with Mr Chapman on one side and Conor on the other. They looked at her as though waiting for her to perform a trick. Emily vaguely resented them; she was growing

## *Expecting Emily*

a baby inside her, wasn't that enough?

'If you could just ease up your top,' Mr Chapman prompted clinically. 'Great. And loosen your trousers . . . oh, they're already loose.'

Telling herself there was nothing to be embarrassed about, Emily peeled down her trousers, embarrassed. Her underwear came into view.

Conor winked at her. Emily shot him a stony glance.

They had discussed knickers the night before (just before the cot incident). Emily had been hand-washing a roomy white pair with a pink trim especially for today. She had three pairs that she rotated for this weekly visit, all new and white and granny-like with different coloured trims. The trims were important – that way Mr Chapman would know that she had actually changed them.

Emily had tried to explain to Conor why she could never wear her black lacy ones in here, for example. Well, the mere idea of sex at these examinations seemed obscene or something. But sex had led to her condition in the first place, Conor said reasonably. Of course it had, Emily said, wanting him to understand. But she didn't want Mr Chapman . . . well, to get a fright. Supposing he thought she was coming on to him?

Conor laughed. Chapman's a professional, he said. He's sick of the sight of women's bums. He probably turns his back on his wife in bed at night with the words, 'Sorry, darling, but if I see another one today . . .'

Emily, perversely, took umbrage. What was wrong

with her bum anyway? No, no, she understood perfectly! It's all very well to say that pregnant women are gloriously sexy, but when push comes to shove, it's only lip-service!

Conor said that she sweated the small stuff. It had sounded like an insult. Emily opened the first of the three Aeros in a dignified silence. Conor enquired carefully whether they were having a row over knickers. The way he said it made her laugh. She dropped the subject. She hadn't thought it was a row. She had thought it was a lively discussion. Still, no sense in letting it spoil the cot assembly. Conor had already studied the instructions for ages in anticipation.

Mr Chapman, of course, never once looked in the direction of her knickers. He just palpated, pressed and pinged her naked stomach, a detached smile on his face.

'The head's starting to engage,' he announced.

Having maintained a respectful distance thus far, Conor now stepped up close to Emily's belly proprietarily.

'Is that good?'

'It just means that the baby's head is working down towards the birth canal.'

'So he's in the vertex position?'

'Exactly!' Mr Chapman was delighted to be speaking to a man, having spent most of his life dealing with women. And a man with knowledge to boot. 'He's head-down which saves us a lot of bother when it comes time to get him out.'

## *Expecting Emily*

Conor nodded vigorously. He had read *The Pregnant Father*. It's a manual, he had patiently explained when Emily had roared laughing; you wouldn't take a new computer out of its packaging without first reading the manual, would you? Emily would and had. Conor had persisted with his reading and could now fling around words like 'haemolytic jaundice' and 'tainted meconium' as though he were a chronic sufferer himself. He wasn't so hot on the practical aspects; when the book had gone on about voice recognition, he had laid his head on Emily's naked tummy that night and directed a rather stiff monologue at her belly-button, starting with 'Um, this is your father here.' Emily had said that if the baby didn't recognise his voice when it got out, at least it would know all about how the lawnmower was acting up. She had only been joking. But he hadn't done it again after that.

'He's lying side-on at the moment,' Mr Chapman said, digging his fingers into Emily's pelvis. It hurt.

'Or she,' Emily said, as loudly as she dared. Mr Chapman could be very intimidating. He reminded her of Magnus Magnusson in his three-piece suit. His chosen subject was pregnancy, naturally. But today Emily felt brave with Conor beside her.

Mr Chapman smiled in a detached way. 'Are you hoping for a girl?'

'We don't mind so long as it's healthy,' Conor said strongly.

'Sensible attitude,' Mr Chapman said just as strongly.

## Clare Dowling

Any minute now Emily expected them to excuse themselves and go off for a round of golf together.

'Are we done here?' she asked, wondering how she had managed to become superfluous to the entire proceedings.

'Not quite.' Mr Chapman was indulgent now as he picked up a stethoscope. 'Let's listen to the heartbeat, shall we?'

It was the part of the visit that everybody liked best. Emily shivered a little as Mr Chapman applied cold gel to her belly. Then he laid the stethoscope gently on her skin, moving it around, his brow furrowed as he listened.

'Ah!' He reached over and dramatically flicked a switch over Emily's head. Immediately, the baby's muffled heartbeat filled the room. Mr Chapman stood back to watch Emily and Conor's faces. This was his moment, the time when he modestly felt like the giver of life.

'It's so fast!' Emily said, more because it was expected than anything else. She lived with this baby twenty-four hours a day, felt its every hiccup and kick. That was enough.

No, let Conor have this one, she magnanimously thought, peeking at him. His wonder was there for all the world to see – well, for Emily anyway, who over the years had learned to spot those subtle signs of emotion. He blinked more than usual, for example, and his chin would occasionally dip in a violent bob.

## *Expecting Emily*

She knew that he would go into Mothercare that afternoon, arriving home with baby ski boots or a car-seat neck-support or some high-tech toy that would confound adults, never mind a newborn. Emily would put it away in the baby's room along with all the other ridiculous stuff he'd bought. She never said anything. She could afford to indulge him. And it made her feel a bit superior in a way.

Back at his desk, Mr Chapman made cryptic notes on Emily's chart. He caught Emily looking and shielded the notes with his hand; lest she discover something about her own condition.

'It's a fine big baby,' he pronounced eventually, as though it were all his own doing.

Emily felt a nervous twinge in her nether regions. Conor sat a little taller.

'And doing quite well from what I can see,' Mr Chapman concluded.

'Great,' Emily said with feeling.

There didn't seem to be a lot else to say. Emily decided that she would take the initiative and dismiss herself.

She stood airily. 'Cheerio then! Same time next week I suppose?'

'Not so fast,' Mr Chapman said.

Emily sat down again clumsily. He peered at her over his bifocals.

'We need to talk about your blood pressure.'

'What about it?'

'It's up a little.'

'How much?'

'Nothing to be too worried about,' Mr Chapman assured her. He hadn't answered her question. 'High blood pressure is a common complaint in late pregnancy. We just need to keep an eye on it.'

Emily's eyes flew to Conor. He gave her a measured look that said 'don't panic'.

'I'm also a bit concerned about your weight gain,' Mr Chapman added.

Jesus Christ, why did everything come back to weight in this world?

'It's due to water retention,' Mr Chapman clarified. 'Surely you've noticed a bit of puffiness?'

'Yes,' she admitted. She had been hoping he would not mention it.

'Nothing to be too worried about,' Mr Chapman said again, tactlessly. 'But I'd like to see you the day after tomorrow all the same. Sandra will fit you in.'

It rained all the way back from Cork. Conor was forced to drive in the end because Emily's car had been towed. When they'd rescued it from the car pound, the battery went flat because she'd left the lights on and the jump leads had mysteriously gone missing from the boot of the car. They'd left it on the side of the road. Conor would have to get Billy Middlemiss to help out tonight.

She felt him looking at her from time to time. But

## *Expecting Emily*

mostly he kept his eyes on the road. At least he hadn't given out about the car. That was some indication that he knew how upset she was. And his index finger was twitching for a cigarette, an indication of how upset he was. Any minute now he would say something momentous, something so sweet and comforting and insightful that all Emily's worries would be blown away.

'Look at that joker! No brake lights! It's a good thing I'm not a plain-clothes garda.'

Conor had missed his calling. Every single trip he wished he were a plain-clothes garda. And he would have been very good at it too, Emily often thought. She could just imagine him whipping out his notebook and leaning in a car window, stern yet compassionate. 'Do you realise you're doing forty in a thirty-mile zone, madam?' And he would write a ticket in his clear, strong handwriting. If the driver were elderly or infirm, he would let them off with a caution.

Conor had a robust appetite for law and order in all areas of life. Which made it all the odder that he was, in fact, a professional pianist. But that too had its own order, Emily supposed, as she thought of him doing his scales on the piano on Saturday mornings, his long brown fingers belting methodically up and down the keys, head cocked slightly towards the piano as though he suspected it were trying to catch him out. But then, when she had left the room, she would hear him launch into Chopin's Revolutionary Study. Peeking in the door, she would see his head flying backwards, his body

coiled with a peculiar, passionate energy. His eyes would squint up and become very far away. Emily would sometimes have the sensation that he was a total stranger. Which was ridiculous. When the piece was over, he would straighten up and he was just Conor again, and he would go and put the rubbish out.

Emily's hands smoothed her belly. The baby hadn't moved since they'd left the clinic. Typical. It would probably torture her all day with its stillness, and then break into a samba just when she was trying to go to sleep. But she wouldn't mind, not this time.

The weight of this new worry settled down on her shoulders, adding to all the other worries Emily seemed to pick up so effortlessly. Please God, she prayed, let nothing go wrong. Oh, and sorry I haven't been to Mass since 1996.

'Look, Emily, it's a bit of high blood pressure, that's all.' Finally, he said something.

'And water retention,' she pointed out.

'It's a common complaint in late pregnancy. Chapman said so. There's nothing to worry about.'

He roundly pipped the driver in front as they overtook.

'Conor?'

He knew what she was going to say and he swiftly headed her off at the pass. 'Nothing is going to happen to this baby.'

'How do you know?'

'Nothing is going to happen.' He just didn't want to hear it.

## *Expecting Emily*

'Do you think I'm doing something wrong?' Emily asked. She knew this was ridiculous, but you had to be clever with Conor, you had to find little ways of drawing him out. Sometimes she thought a lot of their conversations only came about because of her increasingly imaginative ploys to get him to talk.

'Maybe,' he said, flooring her.

'What?' She twisted in her seat, hotly defensive. 'What a stupid thing to say!'

'But you asked!' He was confused.

She hadn't meant for him to agree. Didn't he know anything?

'And what exactly am I doing wrong, Mr Expert?'

'I don't know . . .'

'Don't try and backtrack!'

He shrugged. 'Maybe you're working too hard.'

'Well!' It was difficult to argue with him. Crawley Dunne & O'Reilly, solicitors, demanded forty-eight hours a week of her time, plus the odd weekend. But everybody worked the same hours. It wasn't just her!

'What am I supposed to do, take it a bit easier because I'm pregnant?'

'That would be an option,' he said mildly.

'I can't do that! They've been very understanding so far,' she said loyally. 'Letting me off for appointments and hospital visits and everything!'

'They're obliged to by law. Being solicitors, I'm sure they're well clued up on their obligations.'

She detected that familiar faint note of contempt in

his voice and was insulted on Crawley Dunne & O'Reilly's behalf. They had given Emily her first big break! They gave her a pay rise without fail on June 1st of every year, and regular bonuses too. Crawley Dunne & O'Reilly knew how to reward their workers. And now Conor expected her to turn around and admit that she couldn't hack it just because she was pregnant? Five other women in the office had had babies in the past two years, and not a single one of them had taken so much as a day off before their official leave. So what if Emily didn't feel so hot some mornings? There were standards to be upheld, expectations to be met. She was well aware of them.

'I don't know what you have against them,' she said stoutly. 'They pay our mortgage.'

'I contribute too.'

'Yes, yes, of course you do, I didn't mean...'. She moved on swiftly. 'And then there's the partnership.'

He looked at her blankly – as if she hadn't been talking about it for weeks now!

'Oh yes,' he eventually said. Doubtfully?

'The meeting's today.' She checked her watch. 'In five minutes to be exact. I was hoping to make it back to talk to Mr Crawley.'

They were only in Fermoy. Another eleven miles to go.

'What difference would it make?' Conor enquired carefully. 'They're either going to give it to you or they're not.'

## *Expecting Emily*

‘Well, yes, but there’s no harm in stating my case.’

He impatiently slowed at a roundabout. ‘Surely you’ve proved your case, Emily? After giving those guys six years of your life? I’d think the bloody least they could do is give you a partnership.’

‘Yes, well, it’ll happen today,’ she said, sitting back.

He had taken the good out of it somehow. She had put a bottle of champagne and everything in the fridge for a little celebration later. One glass only, mind. But not now. And especially not after Mr Chapman’s news.

Emily suddenly wondered how they had ended up talking about work, instead of her worries. Conor had that knack, though. Last week she had been putting baby things into a box that would go in the attic. Conor had come upstairs and somehow or other they had ended up discussing Mrs Conlon-next-door’s application for planning permission to extend her kitchen. Right into Emily and Conor’s back garden, as it transpired. They had hurried to the back window to assess the potential damage, the box forgotten.

He surprised her now by reaching over and squeezing her hand.

‘This baby is thirty-four weeks old. Fully formed. If it were born this minute it’d have a good chance. Look at the statistics.’

He was in his plain-clothes garda mode again, breaking her down with facts and figures. And it was working because she wanted it to.

‘You’re right, I suppose.’

'Of course I am.'

They drove in silence for a while, Emily looking out the window. The landscape grew more and more familiar. And here now was Paulstown, population two thousand.

Conor checked his watch. 'That meeting will have started. Why don't we just go home?'

She thought of the stack of work waiting for her in the office. They might cheerfully let her off for her appointments but it was sort of on the understanding that she caught up in her own time. She should delegate, really, but those law-student ninnies on work experience never got it right, which meant more work for her in the end. Besides, she wanted to have her desk cleared before she went on maternity leave in two weeks' time. That too was sort of expected of her.

But this business of the high blood pressure was bothering her. If she took it easy today, then that might sort things out. She owed it to the baby. Anyway, she could always work at home.

'You know, I think I'll take the rest of the day off,' she said loudly. 'They can ring me if they want me.'

Conor's eyebrows disappeared into his hairline. 'Good God, are you sure about this, Emily? Let's not do anything rash here.'

'Shut up,' she snapped. It was easy for him to laugh, with no commitments all day long except for three hours' work tonight.

He was repentant now. 'I'll make you a cup of my special cappuccino.'

## *Expecting Emily*

Emily was pleased. Conor hardly ever made cappuccinos these days. It seemed to take too long. When they married six years ago, making cappuccinos was an altogether quicker business and they had drunk it morning, noon and night.

Still, there were other compensations, Emily was sure, for the froth of cappuccinos.

She looked over at Conor now, fondly. He reminded her of that Beamish ad – consistency in a world gone mad. And there was a lot to be said for that, wasn't there?