

Anna Ryland

# A SECOND CHANCE



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## Chapter 1

*Maja, July 1997*

On Saturday afternoon, Victoria Coach Station was buzzing with the nervous energy of travellers arriving from all corners of Europe. One coach after another entered the crowded terminal and they spewed their human contents onto the melting tarmac. The air in the roofed station was heavy with diesel fumes. Tired and disoriented passengers wandered around the coaches trying to retrieve their luggage. Some were saying good bye to their travel companions. Others waved in the direction of the waiting area where their friends and families had gathered to welcome them.

Having collected her luggage, Maja swung a small holdall over her shoulder, adjusted the handle on her suitcase and began walking to the waiting area. Through the glass, like the walls of a large fish tank, a crowd of people was peering at the new arrivals. Several pairs of eyes were following her as she entered the hall. She lowered her gaze and tried not to stare back but she couldn't resist observing from the corner of her eye. These faces came in so many colours and their features were amazingly diverse. These people represented a new and different world to the one she had inhabited so far. In front of her, a group of girls wearing skimpy summer dresses squealed joyfully next to an ample African woman who had matched a long patterned outfit with an elaborately tied turban. An oriental looking couple — a girl wearing white and red Pippi Longstocking pop socks with a short pleated skirt and a boy in a tennis outfit — was having a noisy reunion.

Moving her eyes from face to face, Maja realised that one person she couldn't see was Ewa, who should have been meeting her here. Her school friend had been living and working in London for a year. It was Ewa who had given Maja the idea of