



Sea and Dreams at the Cornish Bakery



Sarah Hope



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Escape To... The Cornish Bakery

Sarah Hope

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SEA AND DREAMS AT THE CORNISH BAKERY

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to my wonderful children who give me the motivation to keep writing and remind me to keep working towards changing our stars.

For my children
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Chapter One



She was lost. Spinning slowly around, Tammy looked down the path towards the bottom of the hill and the ocean beyond before looking upwards. Nope, she was definitely lost. The bus had dropped her off halfway up the hill. The beach was at the bottom and a school and community centre stood at the top. Should she walk right to the top again? Maybe this bakery she'd signed up to volunteer at was up there? But she'd looked down the street.

Tammy picked up her holdall again, sighing as she realised it had been sitting in a puddle, and began walking back up the hill. She'd seen people file out of the community hall a few minutes ago. Someone might still be hanging around there and be able to point her in the right direction.

Walking up to the door of the hall, she lowered her holdall down and rolled her shoulders back before knocking. Why had she actually packed so much? She was sure the owner of the bakery wouldn't mind her using the washing machine.

A woman pulled the door open. 'Hi, how can I help you?'

'Hi, I'm so sorry to disturb you, but I don't suppose you know if there's a bakery around here, do you, please?' Tammy glanced back toward the hill and lowered her holdall to the floor.

'There sure is. Is it The Cornish Bay Bakery you're looking for?'

'Yes, that's right. I'm volunteering there, starting tomorrow. I'm hoping the owner won't mind me arriving early.' Tammy frowned. If she did mind, she wasn't sure what she'd do. Probably hole up in a bed and breakfast somewhere until she was due to arrive.

'I'm sure she won't. Elsie, who owns the bakery, is lovely. In fact, I've just finished volunteering there.'

‘Oh, really?’ Tammy raised her eyebrows. If this woman had finished volunteering, then maybe there *would* be space for Tammy even though she was early.

‘Yes. My name’s Carmen and this is my partner, Rob.’ Carmen indicated behind her as Rob waved, causing him to drop half the yoga mats he was carrying.

‘I’m Tammy.’ Tammy held her hand up.

‘Lovely to meet you, Tammy.’

‘You two go on ahead if you like and I’ll pop these away and close up before meeting you at the bakery.’ Rob grinned as he picked the mats up again, balancing the rolls on top of each other.

‘Okay, thanks. Come on, Tammy, I’ll take you to the bakery.’

‘Are you sure? I don’t want to be a bother if you’re in the middle of something.’ She looked back towards Rob, who had already left them and disappeared back inside the hall.

‘Honestly, it’s no bother at all. In fact, Elsie asked me to pop by and let her know how my first yoga class went, so I’ll be heading down there, anyway.’ Carmen closed the door and began leading the way down the hill.

‘You’ve just finished your first class, then?’ Tammy glanced back behind her towards the community hall.

‘Yes, that’s right and I’ve got to say I’m so relieved it’s over. I really enjoyed it, but I was so nervous.’ Carmen grimaced.

‘I can imagine the first time teaching a class must be nerve-wracking.’ Tammy smiled. ‘Elsie takes local volunteers then, too?’

‘I’m sure she would, yes. But I wasn’t local. I am now but when I came to volunteer I wasn’t, but after falling in love with the bay, and Rob, of course, I decided to stay and build up a yoga business here.’ Carmen grinned. ‘I think the majority of people who volunteer down here do so to get away from life back home. I know I did.’

‘Oh, I can completely empathise with that one.’ Tammy sighed. Even if this time away just gave her the chance to breathe and to process everything which had happened in the last few weeks, she’d be happy.

‘Here we are, The Cornish Bay Bakery.’ Pausing in front of a small row of shops, Carmen flourished her arm.

‘Oh, it’s beautiful.’ Tammy looked across to the row of ice cream parlours, cafés and the bakery before turning and looking out towards the ocean opposite. ‘I hadn’t realised it was quite so close to the beach. When the advert promised views of the ocean, I just assumed it meant you’d be able to catch a small glimpse of it if you stood on tiptoes in a particular spot in the garden or something.’

‘Haha, nope. Elsie’s guest bedroom literally overlooks the ocean.’ Carmen pointed to one of the first-floor windows above the bakery façade. ‘That one there, in fact.’

‘Wow.’ Tammy grinned. This was just getting better and better. Not only was she precisely two hundred and forty-eight miles away from her hometown, but she’d already met someone who used to volunteer at the bakery and now she’d learned the bakery was literally a stone’s throw from the ocean.

‘Ready to meet Elsie?’ Carmen looked at her.

‘Yep.’ Pulling her holdall further up her shoulder, Tammy stepped towards the bakery door next to Carmen.

Carmen knocked on the glass of the door, the tap-tap the only sound in the quiet cobbled street. ‘The bakery is closed so it’ll just be Elsie here, and possibly her husband Ian, but I think he’s staying over at the lighthouse until the new lighthouse keeper arrives, but you’ll be able to meet everyone in the morning.’

‘Right.’ Tammy nodded, a flutter of nerves unsettling her stomach. She hadn’t really thought there’d be many other people working in the bakery. She’d only really thought there would be the owner, Elsie, and her, but standing here looking

up at the double-fronted building in front of her, she understood why there'd be more staff members.

'Are you okay?' Carmen frowned.

'Yes, I'm fine. I just wasn't expecting such a big place, that's all. I assumed it would be a little bakery, but I can see I was wrong there.' She smiled. It *would* be fine. She was sure it would. Carmen seemed lovely, didn't she? Why wouldn't everyone else be? She shook her head in an attempt to shake off the feelings of inadequacy. She knew why Andrew had included her in the first round of redundancies at the garden centre and deep down she was certain it hadn't had anything to do with her ability or inability to do her job, but right now, she was beginning to feel just as she had when waiting to be called into the twenty or so interviews she'd attended over the past few weeks. And it wasn't a nice feeling.

'I imagined the same before I arrived. I'm sure you'll love it, though. I know I did.'

Tammy nodded. She would if she could start believing in herself. But that was why she was here, to have a bit of time away, to have a break. She stepped back as a woman pulled the door open.

'Carmen, love. How was your yoga class?' The woman turned to Tammy and smiled, her eyes glistening with kindness. 'And who have we got here then?'

'It was great, thanks.' Stepping forward, Carmen hugged the woman before looking across at Tammy. 'This is Tammy. Tammy, this is Elsie.'

'Tammy! Our new volunteer? Lovely to meet you, love. Come on through.' Elsie ushered them both inside.

'Lovely to meet you, too. I'm afraid I'm a little early. I know I wasn't supposed to arrive until the morning, so I'm happy to get a room at a bed and breakfast somewhere for the night.' Stepping inside, Tammy looked around the vast shop floor.

'Don't even think about it, Tammy, love. As it happens, Carmen was our last volunteer, and she's already moved out,

but even if she hadn't, we'd have made space. We always do, no matter how early our volunteers arrive.' Elsie drew her in for a hug.

Letting Elsie embrace her, Tammy smiled as she felt all of her earlier uncertainties melt away. Elsie used the same perfume her gran always had, a mix of warmth and floral.

'Now, pop your holdall down and we'll give you the grand tour before we all settle for a nice cuppa and a natter, and you, Carmen, love, can tell us all about how your yoga class went.' Elsie smiled at Carmen. 'That's if you've not got to rush off, that is?'

'Nope, I told Rob I was popping around. A cuppa sounds perfect.' Carmen grinned and held out her hand towards Tammy. 'I'll pop your holdall down by the counter and we can grab it when we show to you your room.'

'Okay, thanks.' Passing the holdall to Carmen, Tammy turned back to Elsie.

'So, over here we have the bakery counter. You'll probably be working behind there, if that's okay, love?' Elsie indicated the large counter Carmen had just placed Tammy's holdall behind. Empty trays lined the shelves behind the glass, ready and waiting for tomorrow's fresh batch of treats.

'Yes, that's fine.' Tammy nodded. She'd assumed she'd be working behind the bakery counter before she'd known how big the bakery was, anyway. She looked around, her eyes fixing on a smaller counter on the other side of the bakery - a counter showcasing wedding cakes. 'You do wedding cakes too?'

'We do. Our very talented Wendy is in charge of those.' Elsie smiled and led the way across towards them. 'And she also works with Molly planning weddings as well.'

'Wedding planners?' Tammy swallowed. If there was one thing she'd wanted to gain from this trip more than anything else, it was to focus on something other than weddings and now she'd have to spend weeks staring across the shop floor right towards a display of wedding cakes and photographs of

happy couples showcasing the wedding planning services offered.

‘That’s right. And in the middle here we serve coffee and cakes to our customers.’ Elsie indicated a smaller counter at the back of the bakery, tables and chairs positioned neatly in front of it filling the large space in between the counters.

Tammy nodded. ‘I can imagine it gets busy with all of this.’

‘Oh yes, we do indeed.’ Elsie chuckled. ‘Through here we have the kitchen.’

Following Elsie through the door at the back of the bakery, she let it swing shut behind her as she looked around the kitchen. The high-spec stainless-steel cupboards, work surfaces and large table centred in the middle, were a far cry from the tiny kitchen she’d envisaged before she’d arrived in Penworth Bay and different still to what she’d imagined it would be when Elsie had begun showing her around. ‘Wow.’

‘Not what you expected?’

‘Not at all. I mean, to be perfectly honest, when I answered your ad I assumed I’d be working in a small bakery, not something this big.’

Elsie smiled. ‘It was, once. When I first bought the place, but a few years ago, the shop next door went up for sale and, well, the rest is history.’

‘It’s amazing.’ And it was. Even her worries about the other members of staff were quickly diminishing. Elsie seemed so lovely and so did Carmen. Hopefully everyone else would be too.

‘I’ll show you your room now if you like?’ Carmen held the kitchen door open for them.

‘Good idea. I’ll pop the coffee on.’ Elsie smiled.

Chapter Two



‘**Y**ou’re a natural, Tammy, love.’ Elsie looked up from the pastry she was rolling and nodded towards Tammy.

Grinning, Tammy slid the last of the cookies she’d baked onto the wire rack to cool. ‘My gran used to own a bakery, and I’d sometimes help out during the summer holidays.’ They’d been the best summers, the ones she’d been able to escape the chaos of home and work at her gran’s bakery in the village. She’d always been an eager learner, which was likely why she’d been an easy target to be picked on at school, so learning to bake combined with spending time with her gran and the peace of her little cottage had been Tammy’s teenage dream.

‘Really? She taught you well then. Those cookies are perfect.’

Looking down, Tammy blushed. ‘You’ve not tried them yet.’

Pulling her apron from over her head, Teresa reached across the table and took one. ‘I’ll happily be your taste tester.’ Grinning, she bit into one. ‘Yep, perfectly delicious. Now I’d better leave and take the kids to school before I’m tempted to hide away here and eat them all.’

Elsie chuckled. ‘Oh no, you don’t. Our customers won’t forgive you.’

‘Haha, maybe not, but Tammy, they are really good. And believe me, I know my cookies.’ Teresa shrugged into her coat and pulled open the back door out into the courtyard and narrow lane behind. ‘See you in a bit.’

‘Bye, love. Give those gorgeous kiddies a cuddle from me, won’t you?’ Elsie called before turning back to her pastry.

‘I will.’ Teresa closed the door behind her, half the cookie still in her hand.

‘So, tell me, did you help out at your gran’s bakery often?’

‘I tried to, but it was mostly just in the summer holidays and occasionally during half term too, but I think that only happened a couple of times.’ Tammy smiled as she poured fresh ingredients into the bowl in front of her, watching the sugar cover the yellow mounds of butter, a fine sprinkling of diamonds. ‘My gran lived in a village an hour or so away from where I grew up and my parents were often busy with work or my brothers and sisters so it wasn’t as though we could just pop in for a visit. It meant when I did go and stay, it was even more special.’

‘That sounds lovely.’

‘It was.’ Tammy nodded. She could smile now when she looked back on those days and weeks spent staying with her gran. For a long time after she’d passed away, she couldn’t. Those memories were filled with sadness. Now, though, she saw them for what they were—something to treasure.

‘Hopefully, you’ll enjoy working here too, then, love.’ Elsie turned her pastry over and began rolling in the other direction.

‘Yes, I think I will.’ Tammy grinned. She’d enjoyed baking this morning, and it had been nice to meet Teresa. Yes, she was looking forward to this.

‘Morning!’ A voice wafted in through the closed kitchen door.

‘Oh, that’ll be the others.’ Elsie wiped her hands on her apron and looked across at Tammy. ‘I’ll get some fresh coffee on.’

The kitchen door burst open, and a group of three women stepped into the kitchen.

‘Morning, you three. Tammy, this is Diane, Brooke and Molly. You three, meet our new volunteer, Tammy.’ Elsie spooned coffee grounds into the cafetière.

‘Hi Tammy, great to meet you.’ Molly stepped forward and gave Tammy a quick hug around the shoulders.

‘Good to have you here.’ Holding her hand up, Brooke grinned.

‘Hiya. Ooh, are they warm? Did you make those?’ Diane widened her eyes and looked at the cooling cookies and reached her hand out towards them.

‘Oi! No, you don’t. Teresa has already pinched one!’ Elsie shook her head and chuckled.

‘Aw, please? Just one. The teeniest, tiniest one?’ Diane pouted.

‘Haha, go on then. Just this once, mind.’ Elsie waved the tea towel at her and smiled.

Picking one up before Elsie could change her mind, Diane crammed the cookie into her mouth, giving the thumbs up.

‘There you go.’ Elsie nodded towards Diane as she plunged the cafetière, the strong familiar aroma of coffee mixing with the smells of bread, pastries and cakes baking. ‘Judging by how fast Diane ate that, you’ve nothing to worry about your baking.’

‘Thanks.’ Tammy looked across at the cookies still cooling. Maybe she had picked up a thing or two whilst working at her gran’s bakery.

‘Where’s Wendy?’ Holding her hand in front of her mouth, Diane spoke around the cookie crumbs.

‘I’m not sure. I’ll just check my mobile.’ Elsie picked up her mobile from the shelf at the back of the kitchen and frowned. ‘Oh, little Hudson is poorly. Hold on, I’ll ring her and tell her not to worry about coming in.’

As Elsie walked out of the kitchen, Brooke turned to Tammy. ‘Hudson is Wendy’s little boy.’

‘Right, I guess we’d best open up before the customers start banging on the doors.’ Diane grinned as she led the way through to the bakery.

Tammy finished shaping the biscuits from her second batch of cookie dough before placing it in the oven and hurrying through to the bakery. Diane had opened the door

now and the first group of customers were making their way inside, perusing the treats behind the glass of the counter as they queued.

‘Oh, love, I’ve told Wendy to stay off with Hudson today, but she’s got some wedding favours to make, are you okay helping to bake in the kitchen whilst I get those made please?’ Elsie walked past, phone in hand, and touched Tammy on the forearm.

‘Wedding favours?’ Tammy resisted the urge to touch the now-empty space below her neck where her locket used to lie. ‘Of course.’



‘UMM, WHAT SMELLS SO good?’ The kitchen door swung open, and Teresa appeared carrying an empty cake stand.

Looking up from the small cupcakes she was placing onto the cooling rack, Tammy grinned. ‘Pistachio and green tea cupcakes by any chance?’

‘Ooh yes, that’s it. Are they for a wedding?’

‘Yep. I can’t take the credit though, as much as I’d love to. Elsie made them but has had to run out to take an order to the pub, so I’ve just taken them out.’ Sliding the last of the favours off the baking tray, Tammy placed it down.

‘How are you finding the bay?’ Teresa set the cake stand on the stainless-steel tabletop. ‘Although, that’s probably a daft question, isn’t it? You’ve likely not had much of a chance to explore?’

‘Not really. I walked up to the community hall when I first got here yesterday.’ Tammy grimaced. ‘I got completely lost but luckily ran into Carmen who used to volunteer here.’

‘Oh, Carmen. That was lucky! If you get a chance to take a wander down to the beach, it’s beautiful.’ Teresa nodded towards the kitchen door. ‘Of course, you can see that from the bakery.’

‘It does look lovely. It certainly beats fast-food restaurants and empty shops lining the streets.’ Tammy laughed.

‘It certainly does.’ Teresa grinned.

‘Do you need some more cakes for the coffee and cake area? I think Elsie said these ones were ready.’ Tammy indicated an array of cupcakes and a freshly sliced fruitcake on the counter.

‘Yes, please. It’s been super busy out there. It’s been that busy, I’m surprised I’ve not had to refill the coffee machine yet.’ Teresa helped fill the cake stand.

The back door into the courtyard clicked open and Elsie bustled through, a large box in her hands. ‘You’ll never guess what I’ve got here.’

‘What have you got?’ Rushing to hold the door open for her, Teresa raised her eyebrows.

‘Only some more decorations for Ian’s retirement party!’ Smiling, Elsie lowered the box onto the counter. ‘I happened to mention to Gerald that I needed to buy some more, and he’s lent us all his party decorations from the pub. You know, the ones he puts up when he has a function in the back room.’

‘Wow, that’s brilliant. You shouldn’t need to buy anymore then?’ Teresa turned back to helping Tammy with the cakes.

‘Hopefully not. Although we’ll see what they’re like. I know some will probably be a little worse for wear.’ Elsie lifted the lid and grinned before turning to Tammy. ‘Ian, my husband, who you’ll meet at some point, is retiring from being the local lighthouse keeper, so we’re throwing him a retirement party and we’re hoping the new lighthouse keeper will let us host it there.’

Tammy nodded. She remembered Elsie telling her Ian had stayed at the lighthouse last night in order to finish packing up his things, ready for the new lighthouse keeper’s arrival.

‘Right, I’ll look through those properly later.’ Elsie closed the lid and slid the box to the back of the counter. ‘Tammy, would you like to go on your lunch break now? I think we’re okay baking-wise for the moment.’

‘Yes, okay. Thanks.’ Slipping her apron over her head, Tammy grinned. As Teresa had said, it would be good to get out into the bay and discover what it had to offer.

‘You’re welcome to help yourself to something to eat from here or Penny at the café next door always has a good selection.’ Elsie washed her hands before drying them and turning around.

‘Thanks. I’ll check out the cafe then. It will be nice to explore a little.’

‘Good idea. See you later, love.’

Chapter Three



Taking another bite of her baguette, Tammy walked further along the beach. With each step she took, she could feel the sand shift a little beneath her trainers. She hadn't been to a beach for at least four years, unless she counted the brief visit to Western-super-Mare she and her ex, Andrew, had taken last year. And it had been brief.

Andrew had surprised her on the morning of her birthday by telling her he'd arranged for them both to have the day off work and they would be going to the beach. The seaside had always been important to Tammy, a place to reset and decompress, as well as the familiar salty aroma stirring up happy childhood memories. For Andrew, on the other hand, it had never particularly moved him. Having always travelled abroad for childhood holidays, he had none of the nostalgia she had, so it had been a thoughtful treat.

Of course, as usual, her and Andrew's shared day trip hadn't gone to plan and as soon as they'd arrived, the heavens had opened, and rain had slashed down, quickly covering the tarmac of the car park. She'd still ran down to the beach, but knowing he was waiting in the car for her, it hadn't been the relaxing and energising experience she'd hoped for.

Pausing, she looked out across the ocean and shrugged. It didn't matter now. None of their differences of opinions mattered. In fact, in a few short days, he'd be vowing his eternal love to Jennifer, and Tammy would be a distant memory, a blip in his dating history.

'Excuse me, please?'

Shaking herself from her thoughts, Tammy turned and watched as a man walked across the beach towards her. 'Hi.'

'Hello, I'm sorry to bother you but I was hoping you wouldn't mind pointing me in the direction of the pub, please?'

I'm told they serve a mean pie and mash.' The man rubbed his dark stubble.

'Oh, umm, no, sorry I don't.' Tammy frowned. Had she seen a pub on her venture to find the bakery yesterday? 'Up the hill there are a few buildings, a community hall and a school. The pub might be up there.'

'Right. Thanks. I'll take a wander up the hill then.' Nodding, he glanced towards the steps up to the promenade before looking at her again. 'Are you new here too?'

'Yes, I am. I'm volunteering at the bakery up there.' Tammy indicated to the small row of shops behind her and smiled. 'You are too, then? New, I mean. Not volunteering at the bakery.'

'Haha, yes, I am. And it's a good job I'm not volunteering at a bakery. Beans on toast is my comfort zone in the kitchen.' He chuckled before holding out his hand. 'It's nice to meet a fellow newbie. Everyone I've met so far seems to have lived here for years. I'm Josh.'

'Lovely to meet you too, Josh.' She met his eyes as he took her hand in his, his skin warm against hers. A series of beeps from her pocket broke the silence between them and she let go, his hand dropping to his side as she reached into her pocket. 'Sorry.'

'No worries.' Turning, he looked out across the ocean as she quickly *read the messages*.

What time are you all getting there? Trying to plan our journey. Liz x

To the hotel, I mean. Not the wedding! :) Liz x

We're aiming for about two, so we have a few hours to get ready before the pre-wedding dinner. Sam xxx

Tammy swallowed. Her friends and old colleagues were already planning when to arrive in Edinburgh for Andrew's wedding. Was this what it was going to be like? A week full of messages about her ex's wedding? Reaching up, she pinched the bridge of her nose, the tiny words on her phone screen dancing together as she felt tears prick the back of her eyes.

‘Bad news?’

‘Sorry?’ Looking up, Tammy frowned. She’d almost forgotten he was still standing there.

‘The phone?’ He nodded towards her mobile. ‘Sorry. I didn’t mean to pry.’

‘No, it’s not bad news. Not really.’ Not really? Where had that come from? She cleared her throat. ‘It’s not bad news. It’s very good news. Just not particularly relevant to me.’

Nodding slowly, Josh frowned. ‘I see.’

Her phone pinged again. Another message. Tammy glanced behind her, back towards the concrete steps. ‘I should be going.’

‘Of course. Well, I hope we run into each other again.’ Josh raised his hand.

‘Yes, yes. Bye.’ She gripped her mobile as yet another message came through. She knew she should just leave the group. Or mute it until after the wedding. Could she do that? She was sure that was a thing. But there was a part of her who wanted to know what was going on. Part of her which wanted to experience Andrew’s big day, even if it was through their mutual friends’ messages.

Perching on the bench opposite the café, she laid her half-eaten baguette next to her and turned her attention back to her phone. Judging by the tone of the messages, they were all excited. And it sounded as though they were all staying in Edinburgh the night before the wedding, too.

She balanced her mobile on the knee of her jeans before turning and picking up her baguette again. Pulling the paper sleeve down a little, she took a bite. She should be happy for him. For Andrew and for Jennifer. They were both good people. Andrew had been kind to her, before and during their relationship. Even afterwards. Yes, him being her boss at the garden centre she’d worked at hadn’t been ideal. Things had been tense. Everyone had noticed, but he hadn’t been unkind. He hadn’t put her on eternal late shifts or anything.

She shifted on the hard wooden bench beneath her. Yes, there was an argument that he'd chosen her to be in the first round of redundancies, but he'd had to choose some people to be after the news of the company going under had broken. And she couldn't blame him for putting her in that group. Not really. He'd had Jennifer to think about by then. Seeing Tammy at work every day must have been as difficult for Jennifer as it had for Tammy.

No, it was the gnawing in the pit of her stomach, the little niggle of doubt tugging at the corners of her mind which was making her feel uncomfortable being a part of all the wedding chat. Even just being on the edge of it as she was, a spectator to the messages. The reminder was there - she wasn't good enough. She hadn't been good enough for Andrew. Even after four years of them dating, and living together for three, she hadn't been good enough for him to propose to. And yet, Jennifer had been. After five months of them being together, he'd proposed and now, three months after that, they were getting married. Jennifer was good enough. More than good enough.

And so had Beatrice. She'd been good enough for Jack to propose to a year into their relationship. He'd dated Tammy for two. And Phil before that. Again, he'd got engaged and subsequently married the woman he'd met on the first date he'd gone on after finishing with Tammy.

It was her. It had to be. The problem lay with her. With Tammy. She was the one who wasn't good enough. Or was she just not marriage material? Did the men she'd dated see her as 'fun', good-enough-for-now, or simply the better alternative to being single?

She crunched up the now-empty baguette wrapper and threw it in the bin next to the bench. However men perceived her it didn't matter now. That was it, she would no longer be a stepping-stone to marriage. No, she'd much rather never fall in love again than subject her heart to that once more.

Glancing at her phone, she turned it to silent; the screen illuminating with every new message, before tucking it into her pocket and standing up.

Chapter Four



‘Oh, they look good. I love the red and white stripes!’ As the kitchen door swung shut behind her, Brooke placed the empty trays she was carrying on the tabletop in front and turned to Tammy. ‘I’m guessing there for Ian’s retirement party?’

Tammy placed the icing bag down and grinned. ‘Yes, well, trial run before the party. Elsie wants a lighthouse theme, so I’m hoping these will be okay.’

‘I’m sure they’ll be more than okay. They’re great! The red and white stripes just scream lighthouse.’ Brooke smiled.

‘Thanks.’ Tammy lifted her head as the beeping of the oven signalled the end of the baking time for the batch of pastries she’d baked earlier.

Brooke laughed. ‘I can’t wait. It’s going to be so good. And I don’t think he knows a thing yet. Normally When Elsie or Ian plan a surprise they end up letting slip or plain right telling each other, but Elsie is so determined to keep this a surprise.’

‘How long has she been planning it?’

‘Not long. It’s only been a few weeks since Ian announced his plan to retire and then he’s had to wait for the new lighthouse keeper to be posted here.’ Brooke unstacked the empty trays. ‘It’ll be strange Ian not working there anymore but it will be lovely for him to spend more time here in the bakery.’

‘I imagine Elsie would like that.’ Tammy smiled. In her short time here and from what Tammy had seen, Elsie and Ian seemed like the perfect couple, always happy to see the other.

‘Yes. And me too. Ian is my biological grandad. I only found out when I came to Penworth Bay, so I’ve not known

him that long.’ Brooke tucked a strand of loose hair behind her ear.

‘Oh wow, I didn’t realise. Is that why you chose to volunteer here or was it a huge coincidence?’

‘It’s why I came to volunteer. I didn’t know anything about him being my biological grandad when I came, though. My gran had recently passed away and given me a letter telling me to visit the bay. I didn’t open it until I got here and that’s when I realised that I was related to Ian. My mum was his daughter and was adopted. Not that Ian knew anything about having a daughter until I told him.’ Brooke shook her head, her eyes glazing over with tears.

‘Oh, I’m so sorry. That must have been a huge shock for you.’ Tammy wiped her hands on the tea towel and gave her a quick hug.

‘Thanks. It was, but I like to think my gran knew what she was doing - making me come here and meet him. Ian and Elsie and everyone here has just welcomed me with open arms.’ Brooke wiped her eyes and smiled.

‘Everyone does seem lovely here.’

‘Oh, they are. Of course, everyone who works here is but even the customers and people you just meet down at the beach or around the bay are.’ Brooke grinned. ‘Have you managed to get out and see much of the bay yet?’

‘A little, yes. I took a walk along the beach yesterday lunchtime. I probably should have explored a little more after the bakery closed, but to be honest, I was just too tired. I will today, though.’ Tammy frowned. She had been tired after her shift baking, and she knew that she would have felt better taking a walk and blowing a few cobwebs away rather than sitting in her room reading the messages her friends had been posting to the group chat.

‘That’s a good idea. I’m happy to show you around. Any of us would be, just ask.’

‘Thanks.’ Tammy nodded. It would definitely be nice to get to know the bay a little better.

‘Hey, loves. Are you both okay in here?’ Elsie walked into the kitchen, her arms piled high with boxes.

‘Yes, here, let me help you.’ Stepping forward, Brooke carefully unloaded Elsie’s stack of boxes one by one. ‘What are all of these?’

‘Oh, bits and pieces for Ian’s party. I may have gone a little overboard, especially being as Gerald from the pub has lent us their decorations, but I’ve got some sweet cones for the little ones...’ Elsie moved a little box slightly across the counter. ‘... and some other bits I thought would look nice in the lighthouse.’

‘Wow, I think this is going to be the best-decorated retirement party ever.’ Brooke laughed.

‘I think you might be right, love. I’ve probably have gone a little overboard, but I want Ian to know how much we all appreciate the job he’s done over the years in keeping our coasts safe for our sailors and fishing boats.’ Elsie looked down at the boxes. ‘Oh, I forgot to tell you, Carrie has made a special ornament of the lighthouse with Ian standing outside. Hold on, I’ll show you.’

Tammy watched as Elsie pulled box after box towards her, opening them before pushing them away again.

‘Here we go.’ Grinning, Elsie pulled out a beautiful ceramic ornament from a small brown box.

‘Wow, it’s beautiful.’ Tammy grinned. It was. The red and white striped lighthouse stood proudly on a grey rock, a small detailed figure positioned by the door.

‘Oh, it’s stunning.’ Brooke picked it up, turning it over in her hands. ‘The lighthouse looks just like the one here in Penworth Bay and the figure of Ian, wow! Carrie has really captured him!’

‘She really has, hasn’t she?’ Elsie wiped a happy tear from her eye. ‘I thought it would be nice to have it on display at the party. Let everyone see.’

‘That’s a great idea.’ Brooke nodded as she carefully placed the ornament back in the box.

‘Would you mind taking these up to the lighthouse, Brooke, love? Ian is popping round at some point, and you know what he’s like. I don’t want him even getting a whiff that we’re up to something.’ After securing the lid, Elsie began piling the boxes up again.

‘Yes, of course.’ Brooke slipped her apron off and laid it on the table.

‘Are you sure you don’t mind, love?’

‘Not at all. A nice walk along the beach would be lovely, anyway. Plus, I’ve not met the new lighthouse keeper yet, so it’ll be good to see him and welcome him into the bay.’ Brooke picked up the largest box before piling the rest on top.

‘Oh, he seems a lovely lad. I went out for a meal with him last night with Ian. I think he’ll fit in just right.’ Elsie grinned. ‘Talking of which, do you mind asking him if he’d like to come to our bakery family dinner tomorrow night, please? I meant to ask him at dinner yesterday but clean forgot.’

‘Okay. I’ll try to remember.’ Brooke grimaced. ‘I *will* remember.’

‘Thanks, love. Don’t worry if you don’t. I can always ask him another time.’ Elsie patted the box on top of the pile.

‘Morning!’ As Ian’s voice wafted through from the bakery seconds before the kitchen door opened, Elsie, Brooke and Tammy all looked at each other.

‘Morning, love.’ Stepping forward, Elsie placed her arm around his shoulder and began steering him back towards the door. ‘Do you fancy grabbing a slice of cake from Teresa?’

‘Ooh, cake sounds good. I just need a quick word with Brooke first, though.’ Ian pecked Elsie on the cheek before turning back towards Brooke and Tammy. ‘Brooke, love... now that looks interesting. What have you been ordering?’

‘Umm... just...’ Brooke looked from Ian to the boxes and back again.

Slipping her apron over her head, Tammy held out her hands for the boxes. ‘Thanks for bringing these through,

Brooke. I promise they'll be the last of my deliveries to the bakery.'

'Right. No problem.' Brooke helped Tammy stack the boxes in her arms.

'I'll just pop these away if that's okay, Elsie?' Tucking her chin on the top box to hold it in place, Tammy made her way towards the kitchen door.

'Yes, love. Thank you.' Elsie patted Tammy's forearm before stepping forward and holding the door open. 'Take as long as you need, Tammy, love.'

'Thanks.' As she stepped into the bakery, Tammy paused. Which way was the lighthouse? She hadn't seen it on her walk along the beach yesterday, but then she hadn't walked that far, not until she'd run into that man and her phone had begun pinging with messages about Andrew and Jennifer's approaching wedding day. Looking around, she shook her head. The bakery was busy, a small queue had formed by the bakery counter and with Diane serving on her own, Tammy didn't like to interrupt, and Teresa was busy chatting to a couple sitting at the table by the window.

She shrugged. She was sure she'd find it. It couldn't be that hard to find a lighthouse. After all, it had to be along the coast.

Chapter Five



Uh. Tammy looked across towards the lighthouse. At least she'd found it. How she was going to get across was another issue, though. A narrow rocky path protruded slightly above the sea level between the sand of the beach and the rocky outcrop the lighthouse stood on. She wouldn't even be surprised to learn that the path was completely submerged when the tide was in.

Taking a deep breath, Tammy began walking across the rocky pathway. Seaweed clung to the surface of the rocks, and she hoped she wouldn't slip. Focusing on each step she took, she tried to ignore the water splashing against the rocks and catching her ankles.

Tammy paused as she felt the boxes shift in her arms. Please don't fall. Please don't fall. Especially with that ornament Carrie had created. It must have taken days to make. She couldn't be the reason it got smashed. Not this close to the party when Carrie physically wouldn't have time to remake it. She was sure Brooke had mentioned Carrie had volunteered at the bakery, too. It must have been a while ago now, though, if she'd started her own business.

As she steadied herself, Tammy looked towards the door of the lighthouse as it swung open and a man wearing a bright yellow high-vis jacket stepped out.

'Can I help you?'

'Hi, I'm just bringing some bits for Ian's party.' She called ahead, squinting against the sun. Did she recognise him? The dark stubble and the gruff voice. She was sure she did, but where from?

'Great.' The spoken word didn't sound quite as enthusiastic as its meaning.

She did! He was the man she'd run into on the beach. The one she'd quickly run off from, too. Feeling a shoot of warmth flashing across her cheeks, she looked down before steadying herself again and glancing back up.

'Here, I'll come and help you. It looks as though you're carrying enough food to keep me until Christmas.'

'Oh, it's not food. Just decorations. I think Elsie will get the food ready for the day of the party.' She watched as he came towards her, his footsteps across the rocky pathway confident and assured.

'Of course.' Stopping in front of her, he held out his arms. 'What shall I take?'

'Umm.' She shrugged, the boxes teetering in her arms.

He took the stack of boxes before they fell, holding them easily against his chest.

'You didn't need to take them all. Shall I have some back and help?' Tammy frowned. She wouldn't have dropped them.

'Don't worry, these paths can be quite slippery.' He smiled, a quick short smile which briefly illuminated his face.

'Okay, thank you.' Smiling back, Tammy relaxed as she followed him across the rest of the path towards the door. 'I'm guessing the pathway disappears under the water during high tide? How do you get across after that? Or do you get trapped inside?'

His shoulders bounced up and down as he chuckled. 'It does, but I have a boat. It wouldn't do any good being trapped inside for half the time.'

'Right. No.' She laughed at herself. Why hadn't she realised he'd have had a boat? 'I'm glad to hear you don't end up being imprisoned. Although I'm sure the lighthouse is perfectly nice inside, I just mean...'

'I know what you meant, and I quite agree. I certainly wouldn't want to feel holed up half my working life.' He paused next to the door and turned before trying to catch the door handle with his elbow.

‘Here, let me.’ She stepped forward just as the box on top of the pile slid from his arms and she somehow grabbed it before it reached the floor.

‘Good catch!’ Looking at her, he raised his eyebrows.

‘Huh, thanks. All those years of playing table tennis down the local youth club weren’t wasted then. My hand-to-eye coordination is better than I thought.’ She laughed as she turned the handle and pushed the door open.

‘Thanks. Come on in.’ He walked through first and stood using his back to hold the door open for her.

Stepping inside, she looked around as he shut the door behind them. They were in a large room with curved walls, moving boxes were stacked precariously on top of one another covering most of the floor, and bags and clothes covered a sofa and armchair by the window. Towards the back of the room, an archway opened through to a kitchen.

‘Let’s put them...’ He looked around the room before stepping forward and lowering the boxes onto a surprisingly empty coffee table. ‘Over here.’

‘Thank you for helping me bring them across.’ Tammy placed the box she was carrying on top of the pile he’d just placed down.

‘No worries.’ Placing his hands on his hips, he surveyed the room. ‘Sorry about the mess.’

‘Don’t worry. You’ve only just moved in, haven’t you?’

‘Yes. Yes, I have.’ He ran his fingers through his hair and grimaced. ‘Although I wasn’t quite planning on bringing this much stuff with me.’

‘Haha, it always surprises me the amount of stuff we collect through the years.’ She glanced down. When she’d moved out of the home she’d shared with Andrew, she’d been shocked by just how many things she owned. Of course, most of it she’d packed away in her parents’ garage, keeping only her clothes and a few trinkets when she moved back into her childhood bedroom.

He nodded before holding out his hand. 'I'm sorry, nice to meet you again.'

'And you, Josh. I'm Tammy. I think I ran off before introducing myself. Sorry.' Taking his hand, she let hers be enveloped in his confident grasp and looked into his eyes.

'Don't worry. I think if I remember correctly, I was just wandering around like a lost lamb.' He shrugged.

'I take it you found the pub? Elsie said she and Ian had dinner with the new lighthouse keeper.'

'Ah, yes. You caught me out.' He grinned, his eyes sparkling. 'I ended up having pie and mash for my lunch as I mentioned to you and then had second helpings for dinner.'

'That good then?'

'Oh yes. It didn't disappoint.' He glanced down at the boxes they'd placed on the coffee table. 'All decorations, you say?'

'Yep. I believe so. Just be extra careful with this one on top. Carrie, who lives in the bay and I believe used to volunteer at the bakery, has made a gorgeous ornament of Ian and his lighthouse.' She shook her head. 'Sorry, I should have said *the* lighthouse, not *his*.'

Josh half-smiled and nodded. 'No need to apologise. I get the feeling Ian has been working here a long time.'

'Yes, I think so.'

Nodding, Josh looked at his feet. 'I have big boots to fill.'

She frowned. He didn't look the confident person he had two minutes ago. Did it bother him that Ian had worked here so long? 'I'm sure you'll do just fine. Everyone seems absolutely lovely around here. I bet it won't take long for you to settle in.'

'Maybe.' Looking back up, he rubbed his stubble. 'Sorry, ignore me. I'm just being daft. The last job I went to I was taking over from someone who had lived and worked in the lighthouse coming up for twenty years, and to say the local

community didn't take too kindly to me for coming in and taking over his job is an understatement.'

'Oh, really?'

'Yes.' Josh leaned against a tower of moving boxes, straightening himself again as the boxes shifted beneath his weight.

Trying not to smile as he shifted his feet to make it look as though he'd chosen to move, Tammy looked at him. He seemed nice, kind and definitely not the sort of person not to be welcomed into the local community - wherever the community. 'How come? I mean, did you drive across their much-treasured and award-winning flowerbeds on your way into the town or something?'

'Haha, no. I wish I had, though.' He shook his head. 'The keeper I was taking over had been fired. Of course, as I learned a few months after, he hadn't been forthright with that knowledge and had been spreading rumours that I had been given the job due to favourability and he'd been booted out without any notice.'

'Ah.' That made sense. She couldn't imagine anyone not instantly warming to Josh.

He shrugged. 'After a few months of trying to fit in, I decided enough was enough and put in for a transfer and here I am.'

'Here you are.' She nodded. His eyes were dark brown, deep brown - true windows to the soul. She hadn't noticed them yesterday; she'd been too wrapped up in Andrew's wedding and the group chat messages which had been pinging through at a rate of a million per minute ever since.

'How about you? You said you're volunteering at a shop?'

'At the bakery, yes. Elsie's bakery actually. Ian's wife.'

'Oh yes. I remember Elsie telling me she owned a bakery. And you're volunteering? Not being paid?'

'That's right. She lets people come and volunteer at the bakery for free bed and board.'

‘Right.’ Nodding, he shifted along and rested against another pile of boxes. This one a little sturdier than the last. ‘So, you’re working for free during your holiday from work?’ He shook his head. ‘Did that sentence even make sense?’

‘Haha, yes it did. But no, I was made redundant a few weeks ago. The garden centre I worked at is closing down and I happened to be in the first wave of redundancies.’

‘Ouch!’

She nodded slowly. Why was he so easy to talk to? She’d only just met him and yet she was happily telling him her life story. ‘Exactly. Of course, it didn’t help that my ex is the boss.’

‘Double ouch!’

She laughed. Not that it was a laughing matter - her life - and she knew he hadn’t meant his reply to sound callous or to tease her, but the way he’d said it, it made her realise how ridiculous it must sound. ‘Yes, definitely double ouch.’

‘Sorry to hear that.’

‘Ah, it’s just life.’ She looked at him. If she wasn’t careful, she’d be telling him everything about her tragic love life too - Andrew and Jennifer’s wedding included.

‘Yes, you’re right. Life has a funny way of pulling the rug out from under us.’ He frowned, the colour of his eyes deepening.

‘It does.’ Was he holding something back? Just as she was? He was certainly thinking about something he wasn’t ready or willing to share with her yet. ‘Anyway, I’d better get back to the bakery before Elsie sends a search party. Thanks, it’s been nice to chat.’

‘No, thank you and... umm... thanks for bringing all of this lot.’ He indicated the boxes of decorations.

Taking a last look around the room, she frowned. ‘When is the party?’

‘I’d rather not think about it.’ He chuckled. ‘It’s not long enough, and at this rate, people will be balancing their wine

glasses and plates of food on all my moving boxes.'

'Haha, at least they'll have somewhere to put them.' She grinned and indicated the stacks of boxes. 'You could always fashion them into some sort of long sofa people could sit on.'

'Good idea! I could cover them in blankets, and people would be none the wiser.' The light in his eyes was back, even though Tammy could see he was trying desperately to keep a straight face.

'Sounds perfect.' Grinning, she let herself out of the front door, holding her hand up in a wave as she did so. Closing it behind her, she began walking back along the rocky pathway towards the beach. Halfway across, she paused and glanced back at the lighthouse and grinned.

Chapter Six



Tammy shrugged into her cardigan as she stepped out of the kitchen before pausing. The lunchtime rush was in full swing out here. She glanced across to the bakery counter where Diane and Brooke were busy serving customers. She felt guilty sneaking past the queue and disappearing off for her lunch break, but she knew someone had to go for their lunch first and if she were to stay and help, then she'd only be pushing everyone else's breaks back.

Once outside, she looked across to the beach. The sun was shining, and people were making the most of it - walking their dogs, watching their children play in the shallow waves or just soaking up the sunshine whilst lounging on the sand or perching on the sea wall.

Although a walk along the beach was tempting, the gnawing in her stomach reminded her she hadn't eaten since breakfast and being as she'd woken up early to help Elsie and Teresa with the early morning baking, it had been a long time since she'd had anything to eat.

Of course, it was her fault. Elsie was always offering her coffee breaks and to grab something to eat, but she found it better to keep busy, keep her mind off the questions bouncing around in her mind, fighting to be heard. She'd much rather focus on baking and reminiscing about her childhood holidays spent at her gran's bakery than try to figure out what she was going to do when she returned home. Or dwell on the upcoming wedding.

Taking a last look at the beach, she turned towards the café next door to the bakery and stepped inside. It was busy in here too. Weaving through the tables, she made her way towards the back of the café where she might be lucky to find an empty table.

Were all the tables back here full, too? She stood in the middle of the room and spun slowly around. They were. Why was the bay so busy today? Bags were crammed under tables, buggies squished out of the way beside the walls as people chattered and laughed over sandwiches and mugs of coffee. Something was obviously going on in the bay. A craft fair, maybe? Diane had mentioned there were craft fairs held at the community hall.

She shrugged. She'd just grab a sandwich to take away. At least that way she could have the best of both worlds - enjoy the sun whilst squashing her hunger.

‘Tammy?’

She looked around her before smiling as she spotted Josh sitting at the table in the far corner. Holding her hand up, she waved. ‘Hi.’

‘Here, come and sit down if you like?’ Standing up, Josh indicated the chair opposite him at the table.

Tammy didn't need to be asked twice. Slipping into the chair, she looked across at him. ‘Thank you so much. I'm absolutely starving.’

‘You're in the right place, then.’ Picking up a menu, he passed her one before opening another in front of him and running his forefinger down the food choices.

Grinning, she opened the menu. ‘Thanks. I guess I am.’

‘Hi, you two.’ Penny, the owner of the cafe, crossed the room and stood in front of their table, pen poised over the notepad in her hand. ‘Josh and Tammy, isn't it? What can I get for you both today?’

‘Ladies first.’ Josh indicated Tammy.

‘Oh, umm... I'll have a latte please and...’ Scrunching her nose, she looked across to Josh. ‘You choose first. There's too much I want to choose from, and I'll only end up getting food jealousy if you order something on my top ten list of things to get.’

Chuckling, he shook his head and pointed at the menu. 'I'll have the cream cheese and salmon bagel, please. And a black coffee.'

Penny nodded before looking back at Tammy.

'Oh, that does sound good. I'll have the same, please.'

'Great. Two cream cheese and salmon bagels, a latte and a black coffee coming up.' Smiling, Penny pocketed her notepad before walking back towards the counter.

'Food jealousy, hey?' Josh raised his eyebrows.

'Yes.' Tammy placed the menus back between the salt and pepper shakers. 'Don't you ever wish you'd ordered what someone else has as soon as the food comes out?'

'I can't say I ever have.' He chuckled. 'Although saying that, I'll eat just about anything, anyway.'

Tammy shrugged. 'Fair enough. I thought everyone suffered from it but maybe it's just me. How's your day been?'

'Pretty so-so up until now. My morning has consisted of a lot of unpacking, if I'm honest. Although I don't seem to be getting anywhere fast, so I'll probably just shift most of the moving boxes into the spare bedroom or somewhere for the party and likely forget about them.'

'Well, you know what they say. If you don't unpack and use something you've moved into a new house for six months, then you don't need it and might as well throw it away. I think it was six months, anyway. It might be longer or shorter, but you know what I mean.'

'Maybe.' Josh nodded slowly before looking out of the window into the small courtyard to their left.

Shifting in her seat, Tammy frowned. 'Or not. You don't have to. It's not a rule of living in a lighthouse or anything.'

He nodded again, his eyes still fixed on something outside.

'Sorry, have I said something wrong?'

'What? No, not at all.' Jerking his head to face her again, his cheeks grew ashen. 'Sorry, it's just all the boxes... I just

wasn't expecting to be bringing quite so much stuff with me.'

'Oh, right.' Tammy nodded.

'Sorry, I know that sounds extremely vague. It's just...'

'Here we go, two cream cheese and salmon bagels and your latte and black coffee.' Penny balanced the tray on the edge of the table and began unloading it.

'Thank you. They look delicious.' Taking her plate, Tammy grinned.

'You're welcome. Enjoy.' Penny tucked the tray beneath her arm before turning around.

'I'm sure we will. And I bet you're glad you decided to order the same or your food jealousy would be at boiling point?' Josh grinned before taking a bite of his bagel.

'Absolutely.' Sipping her latte, she looked at him. What had he been about to say?

'So, you're enjoying working at the bakery then?' Josh spoke between mouthfuls.

'Definitely. Everyone is so friendly.'

'I've not seen you in there yet. Are you working in the wedding planning office or something?'

'Yuck, no. I'm in the kitchen baking. My gran used to own a bakery, and I'd visit during the school holidays. I used to love helping her and baking, so this makes me feel close to her again.' Tammy smiled.

'That would explain why I've not seen you around.' Josh took another bite of his bagel.

'Yes. I hide out in the kitchen.' She laughed before grimacing. She'd forgotten to pass on Elsie's message. 'I'm so sorry, Elsie asked me to pass a message on yesterday and I clean forgot to.'

'Really?'

'Yes. She asked if you'd like to come over to the bakery for dinner tomorrow night?'

‘Tomorrow?’

‘Yes, sorry I should have asked you yesterday.’

‘No need to apologise. I guess I can. What else have I got to do having only just moved here?’

‘Unpack?’ Grinning, she raised her eyebrows.

‘Haha, yes unpack. Although empty boxes would mean an empty stomach, too.’ He shifted in his chair. ‘No, I’ll come. Thanks for passing on the message.’

‘Even if it was late.’ She shook her head. How could she have forgotten? She took the last bite of her bagel. ‘Yum, that was delicious.’

‘It was, wasn’t it?’ He looked across the room. ‘Do you fancy a walk along the beach? It’s still super busy so we should probably let someone else have our table now we’ve finished, but it would be good to chat some more. If you want to?’

Twisting around in her chair, Tammy looked across towards the counter at the front of the cafe. Sure enough, a throng of customers were queuing presumably for takeaways whereas others were huddled to the side of the counter peering around the cafe looking for empty tables to occupy. ‘Good idea.’

Chapter Seven



Tammy looked out across the ocean as they made their way along the beach. ‘It really is beautiful here. Do you come to the beach a lot? Before you moved to the bay, I mean.’

‘Well...I...’

Shaking her head, Tammy felt the quick flash of heat across her cheeks. How could she have asked that? ‘I’ve just realised I’ve asked a lighthouse keeper if he comes to the beach often.’

‘Haha, the answer is yes. If you were still wondering.’ He held his arms out by his sides and shrugged his shoulders.

Looking across at him, she met his gaze and tried to keep a straight face. ‘That’s good to know, then. It sounds as though you’re doing a good job.’

‘Why, thank you.’ Grinning, he nudged her shoulder. ‘How about you? I’m presuming you don’t always work at bakeries with an ocean view.’

‘No, unfortunately, I don’t. Maybe I should put that in the search bar on the job sites.’ She took a deep breath. ‘No, apart from a super super brief visit to Weston-super-Mare last year, I’ve not been to a beach in years.’

‘How brief are we talking? A couple of days brief or a few hours brief?’

‘Try a few minutes.’

‘A few minutes?’

‘Yep.’ She shrugged. ‘It was raining and the person I was with didn’t understand that it doesn’t matter what the weather is like when you visit the ocean.’

‘Too right. Besides, the windier and rainier it is, the more refreshing it can be.’

‘Exactly.’ She nodded. That was exactly it. As they carried on walking, she looked down, watching the sand covering the toe of her trainers with each step. ‘You were about to tell me why you’d ended up bringing so many boxes when you moved?’

‘Ah, yes, I was, wasn’t I?’ He looked down at the ground, seemingly engrossed in the sand he was kicking up.

‘You don’t have to tell me. I only asked because I thought you were going to, that’s all.’

‘Oh no, it’s fine. I was.’ He looked back up at her. ‘As you know, I had to move all my things from the last place I worked, so that accounts for some of the things. The other boxes though - and there’s a few of them - are my ex-girlfriend’s.’

‘Right.’ Tammy nodded, trying not to show the shock she felt. That was the last possible explanation she’d thought he’d say. ‘Sorry to hear about your break-up.’

‘Thanks, but it was a long time ago now. Well, a while ago anyway. We’ve been split for nine months now.’

‘Oh, right.’ She frowned. If they’d split up that long ago, then why was he carting around her stuff? And so much of it?

‘Don’t worry, I’m not holding her belongings to ransom.’ He chuckled. ‘After we split, she went travelling, and I said she could leave some of her things behind at mine. Of course, shortly before we’d split, I moved for that job I told you about and so I assumed I’d be there for a while and not moving on quite so soon.’

‘Ahhh. Does she know you’ve moved and taken her stuff with you?’

‘Yep. I promised her I wouldn’t abandon it and it was an amicable break-up. She wanted to travel, and I didn’t.’ He shrugged. ‘We’d ended up more like friends by that point, so it was just natural to offer to look after it all.’

‘How long were you together?’ Tammy shook her head. ‘Sorry, I shouldn’t be asking twenty billion questions. You don’t have to answer. It’s none of my business.’

‘No, I don’t mind. It is really rather strange dragging your ex’s belongings across the country. We were childhood sweethearts, met in secondary school and we had been together since then.’

‘Wow, that must be so difficult then, not having her around after all that time.’ She swallowed. Why did it concern her? Why was she so interested? But she was. She suddenly felt as though she needed to know.

‘Yes, and no. Like I said, by the end of the relationship we’d been more like friends than partners and, if I’m completely honest, that had been the way for at least a year before we decided to part ways so our feelings towards each other had changed over time, but you’re right, it was still a shock to the system her not being there.’

‘I can imagine.’

‘Now, can I ask you a question?’ He paused and looked across at her.

‘I guess so.’ She shrugged. He’d answered enough of hers, hadn’t he?

‘In the cafe, you seemed utterly disgusted about the idea of helping out with the wedding planning that Elsie’s bakery offers.’

‘Umm?’ She raised her eyebrows. She knew where this was heading.

‘Can I ask why? You don’t believe in marriage?’

Taking a deep breath, she continued walking. She couldn’t just come out and tell him that she did, but she was always the bridesmaid and never the bride. She rolled her eyes at herself. No, that wasn’t true. She wasn’t even the bridesmaid. She was just never the bride. ‘I do. It’s my ex’s wedding in a couple of days. On the day of Ian’s retirement party, actually.’

‘Is this the same guy who put you forward for the first round of redundancies?’

She nodded. ‘Yep, it sure is.’

‘And you still have feelings for him, I’m guessing?’ He looked across at her, studying her face.

‘No, I don’t have feelings for him. I guess it’s more to do with the fact that we’d been together four years and we’d only broken up less than a year ago and yet in that time he’s found someone else, another colleague in fact, and they’re tying the knot.’

He whistled. ‘That is quick. And another colleague. Did you have a written clause in your contract that you could only ever date colleagues or something? Because if that’s the case, then maybe you were lucky to be made redundant? You know, every cloud has a silver lining and all that.’ He smiled.

‘Haha, very funny. No, at least two of my friends from work haven’t dated co-workers.’

‘Only two?’

She laughed. ‘Yes, now that you’ve pointed it out, only two. Hey, maybe there was a clause in the contract after all and I didn’t read the small print.’

‘The small print is very important. Many a time it catches people out.’ He chuckled.

Laughing, she shook her head. He’d done it again, made her laugh when she’d been thinking about all the things getting her down. ‘I guess you’re right, every cloud and all that.’

‘Yep, you won’t be forced to only date co-workers. The world is your oyster.’ He gave her a sideways look and grinned.

‘Ha.’ Her phone pinged and automatically she reached into her pocket to pull it out, frowning as she glanced at the screen.

‘Not good news?’

Holding her phone up, she grimaced. ‘I’m in a group chat with my friends from my old work and they keep posting

about my ex's upcoming wedding.' She rolled her eyes.

'You're in a group chat about your ex's wedding?' He widened his eyes.

'No. Yes.' She held her hands up, palms forward. 'It's not quite as weird as it sounds. It's a general group chat, but everyone else who is in the chat is going up to Edinburgh for the wedding, so they're posting photos of what they're going to wear and chatting about getting there, getting ready, and meeting up. That sort of thing.'

'Oh. I suppose that's not quite so strange as you being in a group dedicated to his wedding then.'

'Haha, not weird at all. The excitement is high, though.' She scrunched up her nose. 'Sorry, that didn't sound very nice. I'm happy for them. I really am. It's just a bit, I don't know, weird it being rubbed in my face.'

'I can imagine. However much me and my ex are over, and I want her to be happy, I still wouldn't want to attend her wedding, in real life or through photos.'

'No, it's not ideal.' She looked out across the ocean. The water was calm, the sun's rays dancing across its surface. 'Still, they're my friends and I have to accept I'll hear about my ex's wedding and his life if I'm still friends with them.'

'That's very true.' He nodded.

She checked the time before slipping her phone back into her pocket. 'I'd better get back to the bakery now.'

'Okay. It's been lovely to spend some more time with you.' Pausing, he looked at her and ran his fingers through his hair. 'Hopefully, we can catch up again like this?'

Nodding, she grinned. 'Yes, that would be nice. Oh, and remember dinner at the bakery tomorrow evening.'

'Yep. I'll be there. Will you thank Elsie for me?'

'Of course. See you.' Holding her hand up to wave, she turned and walked back up the beach, pausing at the bottom of the concrete steps up to the promenade above. Turning around, she looked across the sand at him just as he turned around too,

their eyes locking. Feeling the warm wave of embarrassment flush across her face, she turned back and hurried up the stairs.

Chapter Eight



‘You won’t forget the quiz night tonight at the local pub, will you, Tammy?’ Diane carried a stack of empty trays through from the bakery and began loading the dishwasher.

‘Oh, no, I won’t forget.’ She had forgotten. Brooke had mentioned it earlier, but she’d been so busy thinking about her conversation with Josh that she hadn’t really given it much thought. ‘What time is it? And where’s the pub?’

‘It’s at half seven and the pub is about halfway up the hill, next to the garage.’

‘Right.’ Tammy ran a wet cloth across the stainless-steel tabletop, collecting the flour she’d spilt earlier into a small powdery white mound.

‘I think Wendy and her partner, Connor, are coming. If they are, they’ll be dropping her son Hudson off for Elsie and Ian to babysit so you can walk down with them.’ Diane turned the dishwasher on before walking across to the table. ‘If they’re not, me and Harry can walk down to get you if you like?’

‘Okay, that’d be great if you’re sure you don’t mind, please?’ She didn’t really fancy walking into a pub alone, not knowing where she was going and where everyone would be.

‘Of course not.’ Diane tapped the table. ‘Great. I’ll see you later then. It’s usually a really fun night.’

Tammy nodded as she brushed the flour from the table into the palm of her hand. ‘See you later.’

‘Bye.’

Watching Diane go back into the bakery, Tammy tipped the flour into the bin before washing the cloth and picking up the spray to clean the table properly. Would Josh be there? She

laughed at herself. Why had she even thought that? Because they'd enjoyed lunch together today? Because he seemed kind, lovely and just her type? She shook her head. She had sworn off men. She'd promised herself she wouldn't put herself in the position to get her heart broken again. She'd promised herself she wouldn't end up being someone else's the-one-before-the-bride.

Nope. She needed a break from relationships and false promises. She needed a break to think about the direction her life was going in, and that was what this volunteering holiday was all about. She was here alone, and she'd leave alone. Single. Free. Besides, what would be the point in even thinking about getting into a relationship with him? He was a lighthouse keeper, it wasn't as though he could move inland with her.

She sprayed the table before rubbing it down, the circular motions of the cloth against the metal foaming the spray into small concentric circles. She was being daft. She was thinking way ahead. Too far ahead. Nothing had even happened between her and Josh, and nothing ever would. She was here for a few more weeks and he was just starting a new job. They were friends. Barely friends. Friendly strangers. Yes, that's what they were.

'Everything okay, Tammy, love? Why don't you get off and have a bit of a rest before the pub quiz tonight? I'll finish up here.' With the kitchen door swinging shut behind her, Elsie walked over and began cleaning the counters.

'No, don't worry. I'd feel bad leaving you to clear up my mess.'

'Go on, off you go. Ian will be home soon anyway, so if I've not finished by then, he can always give me a hand. Go and have a sit down or something.'

'Okay, thank you.' Finishing off cleaning the table, Tammy slipped her apron off and headed towards the door. A rest would be good. She might even have a lie-down. She was shattered.



‘TAMMY, LOVE?’

Tammy opened her eyes. Was that Elsie calling her? Sitting up in bed, she looked across at the time - it was 7:20pm. She *had* fallen asleep.

‘Tammy, are you awake, love? Wendy is here. Are you still going to the pub quiz?’

‘Yep. Sorry. I won’t be a moment.’ Standing up, she hurried to the mirror and picked up her hairbrush. As she ran the brush through her hair, she looked down at her phone on top of the dressing table. Two missed calls and twenty-four group chat messages.

Taking a quick glance in the mirror, she shrugged and picked up her phone before pocketing it. She’d have a look later. Pulling open the bedroom door, she walked into the living room. Elsie and Ian were sitting on the sofa nursing a coffee and a woman was perching on the edge of the armchair by the window. ‘Hi, sorry I fell asleep.’

‘Ah, you did need that rest then, love?’ Elsie grinned. ‘Tammy, this is Wendy. Wendy, this is Tammy.’

‘Hi, Tammy. Lovely to meet you.’ Standing up, Wendy smiled.

‘Lovely to meet you, too. How’s your little boy, Hudson, is it?’

‘He’s okay, thanks. Still not feeling himself, so Connor is staying at home with him. I didn’t want to bring Hudson and then him to spread his germs to everyone.’

‘I told you, love. It would have been fine. If we’re going to catch it, then we will. Enough kids are coming through the bakery on a daily basis and when something’s going around, no one is safe here, anyway.’ Elsie shook her head.

‘I know, but I felt bad.’

‘Well, at least he can hopefully get an early night’s sleep tonight.’ Standing up, Elsie hugged Wendy. ‘Enjoy yourself,

love.'

'I intend to.' Grinning, Wendy hugged her back.

'And you, too, Tammy. Have a great time. You'll get to know the rest of the bakery family.' Turning to her, Elsie drew Tammy in for a hug. 'Daisy and Ollie are dropping little Bonnie off but they're running late so they said to go ahead without them.'

'Thanks. I'm looking forward to it.' She loved pub quizzes. She and a group of friends from work always went to the local pub quiz in her hometown, and it was always a fun night. Stepping away, Tammy followed Wendy downstairs and outside. There was a little chill in the air tonight and she was glad she'd chosen to throw on her jumper.

'How have you been finding working at the bakery? Elsie was saying you've been baking?' Wendy locked the bakery door behind them.

'I'm really loving it. Yes, I've been baking with Elsie. It's been great to have the opportunity to bake again. I used to bake a lot as a teenager when I'd help out at my gran's bakery, but I haven't had the chance much recently. You know, what with working and life stuff. Not to really bake and try new things. How about you? Do you enjoy it?'

'Oh, I know what you mean. I love baking too, especially decorating cakes, so working at the bakery is like my dream job. I get to be creative with the wedding planning and designing cakes, but I also get to bake and decorate and see a project through from start to finish.' Wendy grinned as they walked across the cobbles. 'I must admit, coming here to Elsie's bakery really turned my life around. I'd never dreamt in a million years that I'd find a job which is everything I enjoy.'

Tammy smiled.

'I began as a volunteer here too, you see. I was pregnant with Hudson, and Elsie just took me under her wing. She's just the best.'

‘She is lovely, and I’ve only known her a short while.’
Tammy nodded. She didn’t think she’d ever met anyone quite as kind and welcoming as Elsie. ‘I’m glad I came here too.’

‘It’s up here.’ Wendy pointed to the turning ahead, which led up the hill.

‘Ah, I think this is where I met Carmen on my first day here. Is there a community hall at the top?’

‘Yes, that’s right. Oh, look, there’s Diane and Harry.’
Wendy waved across the road.

Turning, Tammy grinned as Diane grabbed hold of Harry’s hand and they ran across the road towards them. ‘Hi.’

‘Hey, Tammy, this is Harry. Harry, this is Tammy.’

‘Great to meet you, Tammy.’ Harry grinned as they made their way towards the pub.

‘And you.’ Standing back, she let everyone else go through the pub door first. She didn’t know where they were meeting everyone. They did.

‘There they are.’ Tucking her arm through Tammy’s, Diane led the way to a couple of tables pushed together by the window.

Chapter Nine



As they walked, Tammy looked around the pub. It was packed. The tables were full, as were the stools at the bar, and people huddled together standing in groups holding drinks. The pub quiz back home definitely didn't get this busy. They were lucky if another two or three teams wanted to compete. She grinned. This was going to be a good night.

'Hi, Tammy. Cocktail?' Teresa held a glass out towards her. 'I'm not sure what it is. Freya chose it and I think she's gone to the toilet, but whatever it is, it tastes good.'

'I will then. Thanks.' Taking the glass, Tammy paused. There must have been at least twenty-odd people squashed around the table, chatting and laughing together. More possibly. She recognised a few. Carmen and Rob were there, as were Brooke and Molly, but she didn't know who the others were. She was sure Diane had said it was only people who either worked at the bakery or who had previously volunteered there who made up the team. And their partners, of course. Had this many people really volunteered at Elsie's? Was she one of the few who had travelled to volunteer? Did most volunteers come from the local community? They couldn't live that far away, not if they met here once a week.

'There's a lot of new faces here, aren't there?' Diane grinned. 'But you'll get to know everyone.'

Tammy smiled as Diane introduced her. There was no way she'd remember all their names, not straight away at least.

'Here, come and sit over here.' Standing up, Carmen indicated a spare chair next to her.

'Thanks.' Squeezing between the wall and the chairs, Tammy paused as people spoke to her and hugged her before reaching Carmen.

‘It’s great to see you again.’ Carmen wrapped her arms around her before stepping aside so Tammy could get to the empty chair.

‘Great to see you again, too.’ Grinning, Tammy sat down as the person on her other side turned towards her.

‘Hi, Tammy. I’m Lauren and this is Charlie. I know Diane has only just introduced us all, but I remember meeting everyone for the first time and forgetting people’s names straight away.’ Lauren laughed. ‘And that was back when there was about half the number of us today.’

‘Hi, Lauren. Hi, Charlie. Do you live around here, then?’

‘I do. I work at the primary school in the bay now.’

‘Oh, I think I’ve seen that. Is it at the top of the hill?’

‘Yes, that’s right.’

‘How long have you lived here?’ Tammy picked up her drink and took a sip. Teresa had been right - whatever it was, it was good.

‘Oh, not long. Only a few months. I came here to volunteer at Elsie’s bakery. My sister, Diane...’ Lauren indicated to Diane with her glass. ‘...had volunteered a couple of years ago and ended up staying, so I was between jobs and thought I’d pay her a visit.’

‘Diane’s your sister?’ Tammy glanced from Lauren to Diane and back again. ‘Now you’ve said it, I can see the resemblance.’

‘Thanks, I think.’ Lauren laughed again. ‘When I came to volunteer, I didn’t tell her what I was planning and just turned up. I don’t think I’ve ever seen her look so shocked.’

‘Aw, I bet that was amazing.’ Tammy looked around the table. ‘I wasn’t expecting there to be so many ex-volunteers here tonight. When Diane said the pub quiz team was made up of past volunteers, I expected there to be just a couple. Do people travel far to come here each week?’

‘Not at all. Everyone either lives in the bay or in the local area now. Everyone here has moved down this way.’

Tammy raised her eyebrows. ‘After volunteering?’

‘That’s right.’ Lauren grinned.

‘Wow.’ Tammy took another sip of her drink. Penworth Bay was stunning. The beach was idyllic, and the local community was welcoming. She could see why so many people had moved.

A loud, high-pitched sound screeched through the pub. ‘Evening folks. Anyone here for the pub quiz?’

Tammy looked towards the bar, searching for who had spoken. A man behind the bar was holding a microphone. He must be the pub landlord.

A raucous cheer erupted around the pub, people holding up papers and waving them. Tammy hadn’t even noticed the answer sheets had been given out, but sure enough, Wendy was waving one in the air.

‘That’s Gerald, the landlord. He’s so funny.’ Carmen twisted in her chair and whispered to Tammy.

Nodding, Tammy listened as he introduced the quiz. The atmosphere in here was buzzing. People were excited and happy to be here.

‘Question number one: Name the largest canyon in the world. I’ll give you a clue with this one, being as I’m feeling generous tonight – it’s located in the United States.’ Gerald paused.

Tammy looked around the table again as people discussed the possible answer. She loved pub quizzes, but she’d never been very good at them. Her phone pinged. That would be another message. She pulled it out of her pocket and looked at it under the table. Yep, all the messages were from the group chat. She placed it on the table next to her drink.

Chapter Ten



‘Okay, folks. Can one person from each team bring on down the answer sheets and we’ll take a break before announcing the winning team?’ Gerald’s voice echoed around the pub as people stood up, rushing down to return their answer sheets and order more drinks.

The light from her phone screen glowed, signalling a call. Standing up, she picked it up. ‘Sorry, I’d better take this.’

‘No worries.’ Grinning, Carmen stood up and pushed her chair in, letting Tammy pass.

Walking through the pub, she pushed open the heavy wooden door and stepped outside. Darkness enveloped the street, the glow from the streetlamps illuminating patches. She answered. ‘Hello?’

‘Hiya, Tammy. It’s Ellie, how’s it going?’

‘Ellie. Hi.’ Tammy smiled. It was good to hear Ellie’s voice. She’d missed not seeing her every day at work. They’d both started on the same day six years ago and had always been close. ‘Great, thanks. Really good. How are things with you?’

‘Good, good. Look, I just wanted to speak to you because I know everyone is talking about Andrew and Jennifer’s wedding in the group chat and I know you’re seeing them all. It feels awkward, so I just wanted to ring and ask if you minded?’

‘Minded?’

‘Yep. I didn’t know whether it would be better to start a new group chat with just us lot who are going to the wedding but then as I was doing that, I worried that you’d think we were excluding you and ignoring you, so I deleted it. Do you want me to start one? I know it must be difficult to read about

everyone getting all excited about travelling up to Edinburgh and talking about what they're going to wear and all of that.'

'Umm.' Wow, she had been going to start a new chat group without telling her. She guessed that made sense, but since everyone was still working at the garden centre until the closing date, wouldn't they just naturally continue using that chat group? She wouldn't be invited to get-togethers or anything.

'It's completely up to you. I just wanted to run it past you first. I don't know how you'll feel if people start sharing photos of the day and stuff?'

She swallowed. She hadn't actually thought about that. It was one thing reading messages about whether Sam should wear the blue or red shoes with her outfit or Liz should carry her dress in one of those dress cover things or fold it away in her suitcase on the train ride up there, but she knew it would be completely different actually seeing photographs of the wedding. Would they post photos of Andrew and Jennifer together? Her in a big flouncy dress and him in a smart suit? No, why would they? They would all be there apart from Tammy, and she definitely didn't want to see that. She cleared her throat. 'I hadn't actually thought of that.'

'That's decided then. I'll make the other group chat.'

Ellie's voice was authoritative, her decision final.

'Okay.' Tammy nodded. It was probably for the best even if she suddenly felt excluded, an outcast from their once-tight friendship group. It had been going that way though, hadn't it? With them all working together still, it was bound to. She was bound to be left on the side-lines, peering in. Forgotten. She already knew the group went out together without her. Someone always let it slip that everyone had met up over the weekend and she'd not been invited. Of course, they'd always stumbled over their words and told her it was because Jennifer had been there and they didn't want Tammy to feel uncomfortable having to spend the evening watching her ex and his new girlfriend together.

'Are you still there, Tammy? You've gone very quiet.'

‘I’m still here.’ Tammy closed her eyes momentarily before fixing a smile on her face and focusing on the halo of light around the streetlamp opposite. ‘Yes, I think that’s a great idea and I hope you all have a fantastic time at Andrew and Jennifer’s wedding. I bet Edinburgh will be amazing. Are you planning on doing any sightseeing whilst you’re there?’

‘Oh yes, Edinburgh will be great.’ The relief flooding through Ellie’s voice was audible as the subject in conversation changed. ‘I’m really looking forward to visiting the castle, and have you heard about that underground street? At least I think it’s underground. Wait, it might not be. It might be that some buildings or something have been built over the top of it. I’ll have to check but I’m determined to visit there. It sounds really interesting.’

‘It does. I’m sure you’ll have a great time.’ Her voice was flat, she could hear that herself. She glanced back towards the pub as a loud cheer and a round of applause wafted out onto the street. ‘I’m sorry, I really should go. I’m at a pub quiz at the moment.’

‘Oh right. Yes, well, have a brilliant rest of the evening and take care, won’t you, Tammy?’

‘I will. You too. Bye.’ Pulling the phone away from her ear, Tammy ended the call and breathed out a sigh of relief. She’d half expected that conversation to arise at some point. She should have prepared herself. She just hoped she hadn’t made Ellie feel guilty. She hadn’t meant to.

‘Tammy? Hey. Have you been chucked out already?’

Jerking her head towards the path, Tammy smiled as she realised it was Josh who had called out. ‘Haha, no. Phone call.’ She held up her phone.

Coming to stand next to her, Josh leaned against the wooden picnic table closest to her.

‘I’m afraid I think the pub quiz has finished now. I’ve literally just this minute heard clapping and shouting, so I assume they’ve announced the winning team.’ Tammy shrugged.

‘Oh, that’s a shame.’ Josh nodded towards the door. ‘Are you going back in?’

Tammy looked down at her phone, still in hand, and nodded. ‘In a bit.’

‘You’ve another phone call to make?’

‘No. I just...’ She shrugged.

‘You need some time?’ Josh frowned.

She nodded.

‘I’m a good listener if you want to talk?’ Pulling himself up onto the top of the table, he shifted along and patted the space next to him.

She scrunched up her nose. ‘You don’t really want to hear about my problems.’

‘Try me. If you want to, of course. If you need some time alone, then just say and I’ll make my way inside.’

She glanced towards the pub door and then back at Josh. ‘Okay, maybe talking about it will help me figure things out in my mind, I guess. But you’ll have to tell me if I’m boring you.’

‘You’ll never bore me.’

‘Umm, you’ve not heard what I’ve got to say yet.’ She clambered up the table and sat next to him. The wood was cool beneath her, but with him sitting so close, she could feel his warmth. ‘Do you remember I told you about that group chat I was in with some friends from work?’

‘The one where your friends were asking your opinion on what hat to wear to your ex’s wedding? I remember.’

She smiled. ‘Yes, that one, but I don’t think any of them are actually wearing hats.’

He nodded.

‘Well, that was my best friend from work on the phone, Ellie, and she’s making another group chat dedicated to the

wedding so I don't have to hear about it all or see any photos they choose to post or send to each other.'

'That's a good idea.'

'Is it?'

'Isn't it?' He frowned. 'You want to hear all about your ex's wedding?'

'Well, no, but I also don't want to feel excluded from the friendship group.'

'Are they keeping the normal chat group open?'

She nodded slowly. 'Yes.'

Taking a deep breath, he turned to look at her. 'Then I would graciously thank her and take what she's doing at face value. You're a friend of theirs and just because you're not invited to the wedding of the century, I don't think they're going to forget about you.'

'I guess so.' Locking eyes with him, she grinned. 'And it's the wedding of the millennium, not the century.'

'Ah, I apologise for underselling it.' He leaned in a little closer, their eyes still locked together.

'Thank you. I know it probably sounded daft.' It did. She knew it did. And she also knew nothing about the way she was feeling really had anything to do with the group chat. The group chat was just another reason to highlight why she hadn't been good enough for Andrew, even after four years together. And yet Jennifer had after a mere few months.

'Not at all.'

'It did. But thank you for listening.' She could feel the warmth of his breath on her lips.

'Thank you for telling me.' Lifting his hand, he tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear.

Closing her eyes, she closed the tiny gap between them, feeling his lips, soft and warm, against hers. What was she doing? She'd promised herself she wouldn't let this happen. She'd felt something between them, and she'd promised

herself she wouldn't act upon it. She couldn't have her heart broken again. She just couldn't. Quickly pulling away, she jumped down from the picnic table. 'I'm sorry. I shouldn't have. That shouldn't have happened. I have to go.'

'Wait. I...'

Turning on her heels, she walked quickly away from him, stumbling over the kerb as she ran across to the other side of the road, trying to put as much distance between them as possible.

'Tammy?'

She glanced across at him. He was standing now, his eyebrows knitted together as he watched her walk away. Biting down on her bottom lip, she tasted blood as she pierced the skin with her teeth. She shouldn't have kissed him. She couldn't be a stepping-stone again. Not for Josh. She didn't want to be. She'd rather have nothing between them than he finish with her, only to go on and find the love of his life. She couldn't.

Chapter Eleven



‘I can’t believe I’m running late. I never run late when preparing our roast dinners.’ Elsie slid a tray of roast potatoes from the oven and carried them across to the stainless-steel table.

‘What shall I do now?’ Tammy finished draining the vegetables and tipped them into the large ceramic bowls placed next to the first roasting tray of potatoes. She watched as the steam from the vegetables mixed and mingled with that from the potatoes.

‘Umm, could you make the gravy, please, love?’ Elsie slid another tray of potatoes onto the table. ‘I normally have Ian, bless him, help me, but of course, he’s finishing off some training with the lovely Josh and I seem to have got a little muddled with my timing.’

‘I’m sure it’ll be okay. People won’t mind waiting a little.’ Tammy looked towards the kitchen door. She could hear another group of people coming in now and, judging by the excited screams, it was probably Wendy, Connor and little Hudson. Teresa’s daughter, Pippa, had been waiting for him and popping her head through the door, asking Elsie how much longer they would be for at least the last fifteen minutes. She smiled. Elsie had hit the nail on the head when she’d described the staff and former volunteers as her bakery family. Even from the little she’d witnessed, she could tell just how close everyone was to each other.

The kitchen door opened, and the noise of chatter and children running around seeped into the kitchen before Daisy stepped through. ‘Are you sure you don’t want any help, Elsie?’

‘Oh no, love. We’ve got it all under control now thanks to Tammy, love.’ Elsie placed the last tray heaped with roast potatoes on the table and rubbed Daisy’s arm as she walked

back to the oven to retrieve the Yorkshire puddings. ‘You should be putting your feet up whilst everyone is cooing over our beautiful Bonnie. Who’s got her now?’

‘Diane has been holding her for the past half an hour.’ Daisy grinned. ‘You should see Harry, he’s been grinning from ear to ear since Diane began fussing over her.’

Elsie chuckled. ‘That’s Harry for you, baby mad he is, Tammy. Isn’t he, Daisy?’

‘Yep, I think he’d have kids tomorrow if Diane agreed.’ Daisy began piling up empty plates at the end of the table nearest the door.

‘Oh, he definitely would.’ Elsie nodded before wiping her hands on her apron. ‘There. I think that’s us all done now. Daisy, do you want to tell everyone to come and help themselves?’

‘Will do.’ Grinning, Daisy disappeared back into the bakery.

‘Thank you so much for your help this evening, Tammy, love. I really do appreciate it.’ Elsie pulled her apron over her head.

‘You’re welcome.’ Tammy smiled as she stirred the gravy. When Elsie had asked her to help, she’d jumped at the chance to keep busy. Anything to keep her mind off Josh and the way she’d pushed him away. She knew she’d done the right thing to preserve her heart, but there was still a niggles of doubt asking ‘what if?’.

‘Well, anytime you want some extra time off from the bakery, you just ask, love. You deserve it, the amount of work you put in.’

‘Thanks.’ Not that she’d need any extra time off. The best thing she could do now was to spend as much time working as she possibly could. Having as little time as possible to wonder if she’d made a mistake with Josh. Carrying the saucepan to the sink, she began pouring the gravy into the large gravy boat, jumping back quickly as she watched the boiling hot brown liquid splash onto her top. ‘Oh!’

‘Are you okay?’ Rushing across to her, Elsie took the saucepan and gravy boat from her and placed them down before looking at Tammy.

‘Yes, sorry. I just got some down me, that’s all.’ Tammy brushed her top, the liquid spreading into a large brown stain across the pale blue fabric.

‘Don’t apologise. As long as you’re not hurt, it doesn’t matter.’

‘No, I’m fine, thanks.’ She turned to the door as Harry walked in, followed by Teresa and her children as the rest of the bakery family queued for their turn to heap their plates with the roast dinner.

‘Do you want to go and change, love?’ Elsie rubbed Tammy’s forearm.

‘Yes, I think I will.’ She held her top slightly away from her skin, the gravy still hot.

‘Pop it straight in the kitchen sink upstairs in some cold water and I’ll get the stain out later.’ Elsie smiled before turning to Harry. ‘Do I see you taking two plates, Harry, love? Is Diane still besotted with little Bonnie?’

‘She is indeed.’ Harry grinned as he piled roast potatoes on the plates.

Upstairs, Tammy perched on the edge of the bed, the thick duvet sinking beneath her, and pulled her top over her head. It didn’t matter if it did stain. It was an old one. Well, not particularly old, but it had been Andrew’s favourite, so it was probably about time she stopped wearing it, anyway.

She pulled on another top, smoothing the creases with the palms of her hands before she glanced over at her mobile. She had to admit, Josh had been right. Ellie’s idea to keep all the wedding talk away from her had been a good idea. She was no longer waiting to hear the ping of a message or checking her phone constantly.

Sighing, she rolled her shoulders back. Josh. Maybe she had made a mistake. After all, not all men were the same and

surely it would be her turn soon to be The One rather than The One Before The Wedding? Wouldn't it?

She laughed at herself. Who was she kidding? Why would anything be different next time she got involved with someone? It had been the same story for the last few boyfriends. Why did she think things would suddenly change? She hadn't. She was the same Tammy as she had been with Andrew and with the others before him.

Standing up, she pulled her hair from beneath the collar of her top and shook her arms out. She was going to put Josh out of her head and enjoy this evening. She'd met almost everyone who was here at the pub quiz. It would be good to have the opportunity to get to know them more.

As she walked down the stairs, she grinned. It felt just like Christmas Day at her parents' house, everyone coming together, a busy bustling household and an excited buzz in the air. Pushing the door open, she made her way towards the large makeshift table spread across the entire floor of the bakery.

'Over here, Tammy, love. I've already loaded a plate for you. Come sit down and tuck in.' Elsie waved at her, indicating the chair next to hers.

Smiling, Tammy made her way towards her. It was only when she was a few feet away that she realised who would be sitting on the other side of her - Josh. Her heart sank. She'd forgotten he'd been invited. She paused and pulled at her sleeves. Anything to delay the inevitable. Swallowing, she forced herself to make the last few steps and pulled her chair out. 'Thanks, Elsie.'

'I've saved you a bit of gravy, too. Only just though, I think Gavin was about to drown his dinner in the stuff.' Elsie held up the gravy boat.

'It's not my fault your gravy is too delicious to ignore.' Gavin called across the table, a roast potato dripping with gravy from his fork.

‘That would be Tammy you need to thank for today’s gravy.’ Elsie grinned as she placed the gravy boat down in front of Tammy’s plate.

‘Well, thank you then, Tammy.’ Gavin nodded towards her.

‘You’re welcome.’ Sitting down, Tammy inched her chair in and picked up the gravy boat.

‘Hey.’ Glancing at her, Josh held up his hand.

‘Hi.’ Quickly putting the gravy boat back down, she stuffed a mouthful of bread sauce in her mouth. If she could just focus on eating and getting through this meal, then maybe she’d be able to offer to help clean up and hide away in the kitchen.

‘Can we talk?’ Josh’s voice was low and deep creases formed between his eyebrows as he leaned in towards her.

She swallowed and looked around the table. Elsie and Ian were chatting to Wendy and Connor opposite them, Gavin and Teresa were deep in conversation with Lauren and Charlie and judging by the loud bouts of laughter coming from the other end of the table, everyone else was preoccupied and busy catching up. They could talk now. No one would overhear, but did she want to? ‘I don’t think we should. Not right now.’

‘No, you’re probably right.’ Josh nodded slowly before turning his attention to the plate in front of him.

Tammy stabbed a pea with her fork, catching it first time. She was being unfair. She knew she was. He deserved an explanation; she just wasn’t quite sure what to say to him. Did she tell him the truth - that a relationship between them would be a waste of time? Not just due to the fact they lived hours apart, but also due to the fact that she just wouldn’t be enough for him.

‘So, Tammy, Elsie says you’re quite the chef.’ Gavin called across the table.

‘Oh no, I’m just bumbling my way through.’ Tammy shifted in her seat. She really wasn’t a chef. She only knew what she had been taught. ‘I’ve just been lucky so far and not burnt anything!’

‘Now, that’s not true, love. You’ve got a real talent.’ Elsie rubbed Tammy’s forearm. ‘It might be difficult to accept praise sometimes, but you deserve all the praise you’re given.’

Looking down at her plate, Tammy felt the hot flush of self-consciousness flash across her cheeks and glanced across at Josh. Good, at least now he was chatting to Charlie and hadn’t noticed. ‘Thanks.’

‘I agree with Elsie. And your cakes are flying off the coffee and cake counter.’ Teresa smiled before noticing Tammy’s blush and changing the subject. ‘Does anyone know when the next craft fair is being held up at the community hall? It’s Gavin’s mum’s birthday soon, and she usually likes something handcrafted, doesn’t she, Gavin?’

‘She sure does. She still talks about those cushions we got her from the craft fair last year.’ Gavin nodded in agreement.

Chapter Twelve



Tammy leaned back in her chair. Pudding had been apple and blackberry crumble with custard - her favourite, but now she didn't think she'd have to eat for the next week. She took a sip of her drink, smiled and looked around the table. Everyone was having fun and enjoying themselves. And apart from the initial awkwardness of talking to Josh, he'd been engrossed in conversation with Charlie most of the evening.

Standing up, Ian tapped his glass and waited until the conversations had faded and everyone had turned to face him, an unusual silence filling the bakery. 'Thank you, everyone. I just wanted to take this opportunity to welcome Josh into our midst. I'm sure most of you have already met and spoken to him by now but I just wanted to say an official welcome and I know I'll be speaking for everyone here tonight when I say I hope you'll soon feel right at home here in Penworth Bay.'

'Yes, welcome, mate.' Ollie called from down the end of the table, little Bonnie now fast asleep in his arms.

'Hope you're settling into the lighthouse okay.' Wendy smiled across at Josh.

'Thank you all.' Josh nodded.

'And you pop in whenever you want, won't you, love? And join us for our bakery family dinners. You're one of us now.' Elsie reached across Tammy and patted Josh on the forearm.

'Thank you.' Josh swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down.

Tammy glanced towards him. He looked uncomfortable with the attention. A slight pink hue had developed on his cheeks and although he was smiling, he was keeping his eyes fixed on Ian, avoiding looking around the table.

‘Right, well, I’m going to start clearing up. Anyone for coffee? Or a milkshake?’ Elsie looked towards Pippa, Rueben and Toby.

‘Milkshake! Milkshake! Milkshake, please!’ Pippa clapped her hands in front of her.

‘Okay, milkshakes for the kids and coffees for the adults.’ Elsie stood up.

Ian began piling the plates in front of him and stood up, too. ‘I’ll help.’

‘Don’t worry. You two enjoy the evening. Let me and Charlie do the coffee and milkshakes.’ Lauren grinned as she quickly pulled Charlie to standing before Elsie and Ian could disagree.

‘I’ll help.’ Tammy jumped up from her seat, breathing a sigh of relief as she hurried towards the kitchen balancing a tower of dirty plates in her arms, grateful to escape the awkward feeling of sitting next to Josh. Maybe a little time away from him would help quieten the doubts that she’d made a mistake by pushing him away.



‘ARE YOU COMING IN FOR coffee? We can finish loading the dishwasher after.’ Lauren nodded towards the kitchen door as she balanced a tray of mugs and cafetières in her hands.

Tammy looked down at the open dishwasher in front of her and the pile of dirty plates. ‘In a moment.’

‘Okay. Don’t be too long because we’ll help after and get everything cleaned and tidied up in no time.’ Lauren grinned before following Charlie back into the bakery.

Picking up a plate, Tammy scraped the remnants of carrot slices into the food recycling bin and placed it in the dishwasher. She needed this time. Besides, nobody had made any indication to leave yet, so she knew she had enough time to take a break out here and join in the conversation afterwards. She looked up as the kitchen door opened again and Josh walked through, pausing in front of the doorway.

‘Can I help?’

Tammy glanced from him to the pile of plates and back again. ‘Don’t worry. This won’t take long. You enjoy the evening.’

‘I’d like to help.’ He shifted on his feet. ‘It’ll give us a chance to talk about last night.’

She nodded. She’d spent the evening trying to avoid doing just that.

‘I can go if you’d rather not.’ He indicated the door.

Straightening her back, she put down the dirty cutlery she was holding and took a deep breath. They might as well get it over and done with. ‘No, that’s fine.’

‘Great. Great.’ He nodded. ‘I just wanted to apologise if I’d done anything wrong.’

‘You didn’t.’ She looked down at her hands. It had been she who had kissed him first. He certainly hadn’t done anything wrong.

‘Are you sure? It’s just the way you ran off and now I get the distinct feeling you’ve been trying to avoid me...’ He smiled, a small, tight smile.

‘I have.’ She sighed.

‘Oh.’ Josh glanced down at his trainers. ‘Right, well, we can just forget anything ever happened between us. If you’d prefer, of course.’

There, she’d done it. She had missed her chance, messed up. She deserved that, and it was probably for the best. It was for the best.

‘If that’s what you want?’ Looking up, he looked at her.

‘I...’ Did she tell him everything? Let him in? Let her walls down? Or did she do what was probably the sensible thing and agree with him, tell him they should forget it all? She met his gaze. There was definitely something there. She felt something for him and if the tension she felt in the room

was anything to go by, then he might just feel something for her, too.

‘Okay.’ Josh began backing towards the door.

‘No, wait.’ Stepping towards him, she paused. It was now or never. ‘Look, it’s me. I’m not very good with all of this.’

‘And I am? The only relationship I’ve ever had was with my ex-girlfriend. She was my childhood sweetheart.’ He ran his fingers through his hair. ‘I’m completely out of my depth, but I know how I feel about you, and I know there’s something between us.’

Of course. He had told her before. She leaned against the counter and looked down at her hands. ‘I feel the same, but I just don’t think I can open myself up to having my heart broken again.’ She swallowed. That hadn’t come out the way she’d expected or planned. ‘Not that I would jump straight into something, anything, but just that I was with my ex for four years and now he’s getting married. After us being apart for less than a year.’

‘That’s just luck though.’

‘No, no, it’s not. There have been two more exes before him who have got married to the person they met after me. That’s not luck.’ She hooked her index fingers around the word luck. ‘That proves something.’

‘Proves what?’

‘That I wasn’t good enough. That I’m never enough and that the person I’m with always finds someone better than me.’ She swiped at her eyes. Why was she even crying?

Josh frowned. ‘But that’s the same as me declaring I would never get into another relationship because my ex left me. I wasn’t enough for her.’

‘That’s completely different.’

‘No, no, it’s not.’

‘Yes, it is. That’s one person, and not all relationships are meant to last. With me, though, to have three of my exes suddenly find undying love after they’ve split with me? That

tells me that I'm not worthy of that and that I'll never be enough for anyone.'

'You wanted to marry them?'

'What? No. Andrew and I decided amicably to split.'

Josh stepped towards her and held his hands out. 'Then you can't say that you're not enough. You just weren't right for each other.'

'I just don't know what to think anymore.' She let him take her hands in his, his skin warm against hers.

'If you wouldn't have wanted to marry any of your exes, then you just weren't suited. It doesn't mean that you can't have another relationship, or that you can't trust someone else. It doesn't mean that you can't trust me.'

She took a deep breath and interlaced her fingers with his. It felt so right, them both standing there together, her hands in his.

'And what if the next relationship you're supposed to have is the one that's meant to be?'

He was right. What if by not taking a chance on love again, she misses out entirely? 'I don't know.'

'I can only promise you one thing and that is that I'll do everything in my power to never let you down. We can take things slowly, see what happens or just we can stay friends.' Josh ran his thumb up and down her forefinger.

She nodded. She wanted nothing more than to lean forward and kiss him again, to feel his lips against hers, his arms around her, but could she? 'I just don't see how it could work. It's not even as though I live anywhere near here.'

'No, and I must admit that has worried me, but what if things do work? Then surely we'll find a way. Long-distance relationships aren't all that bad, anyway.' He smiled.

'Umm, it didn't work out for you and your ex.'

'Ah, no, but her choosing to travel wasn't the reason we broke up. The reason was because we'd grown into different

people.'

'I know. Sorry.' She closed her eyes. Should she jump? Should she trust him? Her heart was aching for her to choose to, but her head, on the other hand, still had that voice telling her she'd never be enough. She opened her eyes. Josh was right. All they could do was to try, and if she didn't, she wouldn't know what she was missing out on.

'So?' He leaned his head to one side, his eyes meeting hers.

'So...' Leaning forward, she met his lips with hers. It felt right. He felt right. It all felt right. She could only jump and see where it took her.

Chapter Thirteen



‘Hey, Tammy. Over here.’

Looking up from her bag, which she was resting on a table in the coffee and cake area, Tammy watched as Diane waved her over.

Slipping her mobile into her bag, Tammy zipped it up and walked across to the bakery counter. ‘Everything okay?’

‘Of course.’ Diane grinned as she looked at her. ‘Where are you off to on your day off? I don’t think you’ve stopped smiling this morning.’

Tammy felt the flush of a blush across her cheeks and tried and failed to straighten her face. ‘Oh, I’m off out to the nature reserve.’

‘Oh yes. What are you doing there?’

‘Umm, we’ll probably go for a walk and maybe grab a coffee.’ Tammy hooked her bag over her shoulder.

‘We? Who would we be?’ Brooke sidled up to Diane, a paper bag in one hand and a pair of tongs in the other.

Tammy glanced towards the door. ‘Josh.’

‘The new lighthouse keeper?’ Diane grinned.

‘Yes.’

‘And?’ Laying her hands on the top of the counter, Diane raised her eyebrows.

‘And we’re going to the nature reserve.’ Despite her best efforts, Tammy could feel the smile tugging at her lips.

‘On a date?’ Brooke dropped a doughnut into the paper bag.

Tammy grimaced. There wasn’t any point in telling them she and Josh were just friends. She was certain the truth was

etched across her face. ‘Umm, yes.’

‘Ooh. That’s exciting!’ Diane clapped her hands together.

‘It’s only our first date, so it’s super early still.’

‘I know, I know, but it’s still exciting and I’ve got a good feeling about this.’ Diane nodded.

‘Thank you.’ Brooke passed the bag across the counter to her customer before turning back to Tammy. ‘Diane’s right. I wondered if there was something between you two last night.’

‘Really?’ Tammy frowned. They’d ignored each other most of the evening.

‘Yep, really. You both seemed super awkward during dinner, but then after you’d tidied everything away together you both seemed more relaxed. Happy.’

Tammy nodded. She hadn’t realised it had been quite that obvious. Had anyone else noticed?

‘Talking of him. Here he is.’ Brooke placed her hand over Tammy’s. ‘Have a great time.’

‘Yes, enjoy.’ Diane grinned before turning to the next customer.

Turning around, Tammy smiled as she watched Josh walk in and hold the door open for a man pushing a buggy before walking across to him. ‘Hi.’

‘Hey. Are you ready?’

‘Absolutely.’ She stepped out onto the cobbles as he closed the door behind them.



‘I CAN’T BELIEVE WE’RE going on a boat!’ Tammy gripped Josh’s hand as she stepped into the rowing boat. ‘I’ve not been rowing since I was a child.’ She frowned. Had she ever actually been rowing? Maybe. She remembered a boating lake at the fairground her parents used to take her to by the beach, but whether she’d actually ever ventured out on one she couldn’t remember. If she had, she must have been young.

‘But you’re happy to have a go? We can do something else if you’d prefer?’ Josh paused on the small jetty at the edge of the lake, his hand still holding hers as she lowered herself onto the wooden bench in the boat.

‘Oh, I’m more than happy to. Although half of me wishes you’d warned me so I could have brought a change of clothes.’ She laughed.

‘Oi! I do use a rowing boat to get to and from the lighthouse at high tide, I’ll have you know. So, I’m a bit of an expert.’ Chuckling, he stepped in, the wooden boat moving from side to side with his movement.

‘Haha, I had forgotten. Does that mean we’re likely to stay in the boat rather than being tipped into the lake then?’

‘That’s the plan.’ Steadying himself, he lowered himself down opposite her and picked up the oars.

‘I like that plan.’ Grinning, she looked around. Being in the heart of the nature reserve, the lake was surrounded by trees and the only noise was the chirping of the birds flying from branch to branch. This was perfect.

‘Good.’ Pushing them away from the jetty with the tip of an oar, Josh then began to row.

Tammy watched as the wood of the oars sliced through the surface of the water, the boat floating along with each stroke. ‘So, tell me something about yourself.’

‘What like?’ He glanced at her before pushing the oars back into the water. ‘What would you like to know?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. Anything really.’ She relaxed a little. ‘What made you choose to be a lighthouse keeper?’

‘My school career’s advisor suggested it.’

‘Really?’

‘No, not really.’ He smiled. ‘Nah. For as long as I can remember, I’ve loved the ocean. It made me feel free, you know?’

She nodded. She felt the same.

‘I just felt at home. Every time we visited, I felt as though that was where I was supposed to be and knew that one day I wanted to be living near the ocean. Then one day as a teenager, my dad took me around a lighthouse, and everything just clicked. I realised being a lighthouse keeper would be the perfect job for me. How about you? How did you decide to do your job? Sorry, your old job?’

‘I studied horticulture at college and have always been fascinated with nature and then the job at the garden centre came up, so I applied.’ She shrugged. It really had been as simple as that. ‘I always loved growing things. My parents gave me a patch of garden to do with how I pleased when I was about five, six, I think. And I grew things. I used to plant bulbs and seeds and draw all these little pictures to record how they grew.’

‘This place is perfect for you then?’ Josh used an oar to indicate the banks of the lake, the nature reserve.

‘Yes, it is.’ She smiled.

‘Do you want a go?’ He nodded towards the oars.

‘Me?’ She grimaced.

‘Go on. I’ll teach you what to do.’

‘Uh, okay then, why not?’

As he passed the oars to her, the boat bobbed up and down on the calm water.

‘What do I do?’ She dipped the oars into the water and pulled back as the boat pushed backwards. ‘Is this right?’

‘Yes, that’s right. You’re a natural.’ He grinned. ‘Okay, I have a question for you.’

‘Oh dear, I asked for that, didn’t I?’ Tammy bit down on her bottom lip. What was he about to ask her?

‘Ha, you did.’ He leaned back in the boat, relaxing his shoulders. ‘What is your best achievement in life?’

‘My best achievement?’ She widened her eyes. ‘That’s a deep question.’

‘It is.’ He nodded.

‘Okay, umm, my best achievement, the one thing I’m most proud of?’ She shook her head. ‘I don’t know. I guess it’s the time I stepped in and kept my gran’s bakery running when she was admitted to hospital.’ She looked out across the lake. Three ducks were dipping in and out of the reeds to their right.

‘Was she okay?’

‘Umm. No. Well, yes, she was after that, but she had to give up the bakery a few months later, which had been her life’s passion.’

‘I’m sorry to hear that.’ Leaning forward, he laid his fingers on her hand, gripping the oar with her.

‘I was only eighteen at the time. It had been the summer before I went off to uni.’

‘Wow, that’s impressive.’

‘Not really. I knew what I was doing. I used to help during the holidays from school. My gran had taught me everything I needed to know. I was only doing what she’d taught me.’ She looked down at their hands.

‘Still, it’s impressive and I can understand why you chose it as your biggest achievement.’

She shook her head. She missed her gran. It had been two years after she’d been discharged from the hospital, almost to the day, that she’d passed away. ‘How about you? What’s your biggest achievement?’

‘To date, it’s probably moving here. Taking that leap of faith and moving somewhere on my own. I’ve moved around a fair bit with the job, but of course, I wasn’t alone. This move, though, to Penworth Bay, I was.’

‘You’d always lived with your ex and she’d moved with you?’

‘Exactly. I’m embarrassed to admit that I almost didn’t come. I almost thought it would be easier to stay at my old job.’

‘The one you hated?’

‘The one where everyone hated me, yes.’ He grimaced.

‘I can’t imagine anyone hating you.’ She shook her head.

‘Well, I bet you would if you’d thought I’d moved in and replaced Ian without a reason.’ He shrugged and leaned back again. ‘It sounds pretty daft after your answer.’

‘Not at all. It’s a big thing to move somewhere you don’t know anyone. A place you’ve never been to before.’

‘You’ve done just that. Coming to Elsie’s to volunteer.’

‘Nah, it’s temporary, isn’t it? It’s completely different to just taking a chance and moving.’ She frowned. It was temporary. She wasn’t here for long. She shook her head and forced herself to smile. She wasn’t going to spoil a perfectly lovely day by thinking about what might or might not happen in the future. They were here now and enjoying themselves. That was all that mattered. And Josh was right, long-distance relationships weren’t the worst thing. They’d be perfectly fine if they were still together when she left.

‘How do you fancy going to get a coffee? I’m sure I saw a cafe listed on the information board in the car park.’

‘I think that sounds like a great idea.’ She grinned before looking around. She couldn’t even see the jetty where they’d pushed off from. ‘I have no idea where we are, though.’

Josh straightened his back and twisted around, searching the banks of the lake. ‘Ah, neither do I.’

‘Where shall I row us to?’

‘I vote we choose a direction and head that way.’ He held his hands out.

‘Haha, I guess that’s as good a solution as any. And I suppose if we get to the bank, we can just row along to find the jetty.’

‘Yep, that’s the plan.’ He grinned.

Chapter Fourteen



‘Morning, Tammy.’ Diane closed the bakery door behind her and slipped out of her coat. ‘It looks as though it’s going to rain out there today. The clouds are really grey.’

‘Hi. Ah, do you think we’ll be quieter today, then? Will people stay at home?’ Tammy slid a tray of freshly iced cupcakes behind the glass off the counter.

‘Don’t count on it.’ Diane grinned. ‘If people are down here for their holiday, then they’ll visit whether or not it’s chucking it down. If anything, we might just be a little busier on the coffee and cake counter than anything else.’

‘Oh, okay.’

‘Anyway, enough of the weather talk.’ Diane slipped her apron over her head. ‘Tell me how your date with Josh went? Where did you go? What did you do?’

Tammy grinned. ‘We went to the nature reserve and went rowing on the lake.’

‘Ooh very romantic.’

‘It was. We had a walk after and finished up at the café for coffee and cake.’ Tammy looked towards the door as Brooke, Molly and Wendy walked in. ‘Morning.’

‘Morning. Yuck, it’s going to rain and we’re going to be super busy today, aren’t we?’ Brooke frowned.

‘Probably. What’s the matter?’ Diane looked across at her, concern etched across her face. ‘You usually love it when it’s busier.’

‘I know. I’m just not feeling that great. I didn’t get much sleep last night and have a banging headache this morning.’ Brooke lowered her bag onto the top of the counter and pinched the bridge of her nose. ‘Sorry, ignore me.’

‘Aw, I hope you’re not coming down with the bug that Hudson had.’ Wendy frowned and rubbed Brooke on the back.

‘I’ll be okay.’ Brooke shook her head. ‘I probably just need a coffee.’

‘Why don’t you go home if you’re not feeling well?’ Diane frowned.

‘No, I’ll be fine.’ Brooke slipped out of her coat and hung it up.

‘Morning, everyone.’ Elsie bustled in from the kitchen carrying two trays brimming with pasties.

‘Morning. Looks like rain today.’ Ian hurried behind her, carrying another two trays. ‘Brooke, love. Are you feeling okay? You don’t look as though you’ve had an ounce of sleep last night.’

‘I’m okay.’ Brooke smiled weakly.

‘No, she’s not. She’s not feeling well.’ Diane mouthed ‘sorry’ to Brooke.

‘Oh, love, you shouldn’t be here then. Why didn’t you call in sick?’ Elsie placed the trays down and held the back of her hand against Brooke’s forehead. ‘You’re burning up, love.’

‘It might be the bug that Hudson had then. His started out with a temperature. Sorry.’ Wendy looked down.

‘Don’t be daft, Wendy, love. Like I said to you before, if we’re going to get something, we’ll get it. We’re surrounded by enough people coming and going each day.’ Elsie turned to Brooke. ‘Go on home., love, and get some rest.’

‘Yep, no arguments.’ Ian put his trays down and picked up Brooke’s coat, holding it open for her. ‘I’ll take you home ‘

‘No, you don’t have to do that.’ Brooke shrugged into her coat.

‘Oh, I know I don’t, but I want to. It’s a grandfatherly duty, anyway.’ Ian grinned and held the door open for her. ‘And once I’ve got you set up in front of the TV with a blanket and hot chocolate, I’ll come back and help out behind the counter.’

‘Hope you feel better soon, Brooke.’ Diane called as the front door closed behind them.

‘Right, we’d better open up.’ Elsie turned the sign in the window from *Closed* to *Open* before turning to Wendy and Molly. ‘How are you two set up for this morning? Is there any chance one of you could cover for Brooke until Ian gets back, please?’

‘I think we’ve got clients. I’ll check though, I might have it wrong and they might be scheduled in for ten.’ Molly pulled a purple diary from her bag and flicked through the pages. ‘Sorry, they’re due in first thing.’

‘No worries, loves, we’ll cope.’

‘I can cover if you like?’ Tammy glanced at the bakery counter. As much as she loved baking in the kitchen with Elsie, half an hour behind the counter and meeting the customers sounded like fun.

‘Are you sure?’ Elsie looked at her.

‘Yes, of course.’ Twisting around, Tammy checked the large clock on the wall behind the counter. ‘I put some rolls in the oven which are due out any time now, so I’ll run and take those out first.’

‘Don’t worry, love. I can do that. Thank you.’ Elsie smiled before hurrying back through the kitchen door.

Picking up the trays Ian had abandoned on the counter, Tammy slid them behind the glass and looked across at the till.

‘Do you want me to show you how to use it?’ Diane joined her behind the counter.

‘I think I should be okay. It looks like the ones at the garden centre where I used to work. Although I didn’t go on the till much, only when it was super busy and I was called away from dealing with the plants, so I might shout if I need help.’

‘No worries.’ Diane grinned as the first customer walked through the door.



‘THANK YOU. HOPE YOU enjoy.’ Passing over a bag of rolls, Tammy waved to the small toddler the woman was carrying before turning to the next customer in line. ‘Josh!’

‘Morning!’ Stopping in front of her, Josh smiled. ‘I thought I’d pop by and see if you had any plans for lunch.’

Tammy grinned as she saw Diane looking at her out of the corner of her eye. ‘Well, it’s great to see you. Umm, I don’t think I have any, actually.’

‘I was hoping you’d say that.’ Josh laid his hands on top of the counter. ‘Did you fancy grabbing some chips and eating them on the beach?’

Tammy glanced out of the window. Diane had been right about predicting rain. A fine sheen of water was glistening against the cobbles and the windows were speckled with raindrops. She shrugged. She knew how Josh felt about the beach and he knew how she felt. Rain wouldn’t stop them from enjoying chips and a walk along the sand. ‘Yes, that would be lovely.’

‘Great. Do you want to message me when you know what time your break will be?’

‘I will.’ Tammy touched his hand briefly as Elsie rushed up to the counter and patted Josh on the arm. ‘Josh, love, oh am I glad to see you!’

‘Hi, Elsie. What can I do for you?’ Josh turned to face her.

Elsie glanced quickly out of the window. ‘Can I borrow you in the kitchen for a few moments, please? I just have a couple of things to run past you for Ian’s retirement party and he’s due back any moment now.’

‘Uh, yes, of course.’ Josh smiled at Tammy before following Elsie through to the kitchen.

‘You’re smitten, aren’t you?’ Diane nudged her shoulder before picking up a paper bag.

‘What? I don’t know what you mean.’ Tammy felt the familiar heat of a blush flashing across her cheeks.

‘Oh yes, you do.’ Diane grinned, a glint in her eye.

Scrunching up her nose, Tammy laughed and turned to the customer in front of her. ‘Hi, what can I get you today?’

‘Oh, let me see. I have a list somewhere.’ The woman patted her coat pockets down before pulling a scrap of paper from her handbag. ‘Can I have two cheese and onion pasties, four traditional Cornish pasties, and six of your doughnuts please?’

‘Of course. Coming up.’ Tammy turned to pick up the tongs and froze. Ian had just walked in. ‘Hi, Ian, how’s Brooke?’

Coming up to the counter, Ian clasped his hands on top. ‘I think she’ll be okay, love. A bit of rest should do her the world of good.’

‘Great. That’s good to hear.’ She placed the pasties into bags as Ian pulled his phone out and began to scroll through. ‘That’ll be ten pounds and fifty pence, please?’

‘Thank you. They’re not all for me.’ The woman laughed as she tapped her card against the machine. ‘My colleagues love Elsie’s pasties and I was down this way, so they’re for a special treat.’

Tammy glanced quickly at Ian. He was just pocketing his mobile. ‘I hope you all enjoy them then. Thank you.’

‘Thanks. Bye.’ Bundling the bulging paper bags into a canvas tote bag, the woman slipped her card back into her purse and turned to the door.

Looking at the next customer, Tammy grimaced as she noticed Ian heading towards the kitchen. If he got there before she could warn Elsie and Josh, the surprise retirement party might not be such a surprise anymore. ‘I’m so sorry, Diane will serve you just a moment. I just have to run to the kitchen quickly.’

The man in front of her nodded and stepped back into the queue.

‘Ian, Ian, hold up.’ Rushing around from behind the counter, Tammy caught up with Ian and stood in front of the kitchen door, blocking his way.

‘Is everything okay, Tammy?’ Ian frowned.

‘Yes, yes, it is. You said Brooke was okay, did you, Ian?’ She raised her voice at his name. ‘You’re back here now?’

Frowning, Ian looked down at himself. ‘Yes, yes, I’m back and ready to work. I just need to speak to Elsie quickly.’

Tammy jumped from foot to foot. She didn’t think she could delay him much longer. ‘You’re going to the kitchen to talk to Elsie. Is that right, Ian?’

‘I am. I won’t be long, love.’

‘Right, okay. Hope everything is okay in the kitchen, Ian.’ With her last effort, Tammy stood to the side and watched as Ian walked through the door. There wasn’t anything else she could do. Sighing, she glanced at Teresa, who was serving behind the coffee and cake counter.

Teresa shrugged. ‘You did all you could.’

‘Yes.’ Tammy grimaced before heading back towards the counter.

‘Oh, Tammy, while you’re there, can you grab us some more rolls, please?’ Diane called across the counter towards her.

‘Okay.’ Nodding, she made her way back to the kitchen and pushed open the door. Pausing, she looked around. Elsie was kneading dough as Ian perched on a stool, chatting to her. There was no sign of Josh. He and Elsie must have already finished their chat. She’d likely made a complete fool of herself for nothing then.

‘Are you all right, love?’ Elsie looked up from the dough.

‘Yes, we just need some more rolls if you’ve got any ready, please?’

‘Oh yes, love. There’s some over on the rack cooling.’
Elsie nodded to the work surface running under the window.

‘Thanks.’

‘Here, I’ll take those out, Tammy.’ Ian stood up and made his way towards the rolls. ‘I’ll go behind the counter and help Diane out now.’

‘Okay.’ Tammy pulled a ceramic bowl from the cupboard. ‘Shall I make some more cookies? We seem to have sold loads already today so far.’

‘Yes, that would be great, thanks.’ Elsie nodded as the kitchen door closed behind him before turning to Tammy. ‘Thank you for the warning, we…’

The kitchen door swung open again as Ian made his way back through. ‘Oh, I just forgot. I needed to let you know who I saw on my way back from Brooke’s.’

‘Oh, who was that then, love?’ Elsie turned her attention to Ian.

‘The couple who used to come in each day for their hot chocolates. Do you remember them?’

‘Oh yes, the man with the baseball cap?’

‘That’s them.’

Elsie looked towards the kitchen door. ‘Tammy, would you mind going back out to the counter please to help Diane for a few moments?’

‘Oh no, she’s fine for now. There’s a bit of a lull. I’ve given her the rolls, but I would have stayed out there if she’d needed my help.’ Ian grinned.

‘Oh, right? Okay.’ Elsie nodded.

‘I’ll just go and grab some more flour. We’ve run out.’
Picking up the plastic container, Tammy made her way towards the larder at the back of the bakery.

‘Thank you.’

Pushing the door open, Tammy stepped inside, the light from the kitchen illuminating the shelves of ingredients. Looking along the shelves, she walked in further, searching for the flour. She knew it would be in here. Elsie kept everything in the dimly lit larder. There it was. Reaching up, she screamed as she caught sight of something moving in the shadows and turning quickly she knocked a tub of chocolate drops to the floor with her elbow.

‘Everything okay, love?’ Ian called out.

‘Shh, it’s just me,’ Josh whispered and stepped out from the corner of the larder, his forefinger against his lips.

Trying to stifle a laugh, Tammy called over her shoulder to Ian, ‘Yes, all good. Sorry, I’ve just knocked a tub of chocolate drops to the floor.’

‘Good, good.’

Tilting her head, she listened to Ian’s footsteps as he returned to Elsie and began speaking again. Looking at Josh, she shook her head and whispered. ‘I thought you were a mouse or something.’

‘No wonder you screamed. It’s not every day that you find a mouse as big as me in the bakery larder.’ He grinned, the skin around his eyes creasing with suppressed laughter.

‘Haha, very funny.’ Keeping her voice low, she knelt to the floor. The chocolate drops had gone everywhere.

‘Here, let me help.’ Lowering himself next to her, Josh began scooping the small drops into the palm of his hand. ‘Thanks for the heads up, by the way. I just wish I’d thought and legged it out of the back door into the courtyard instead of heading for the larder.’

‘Glad you heard. Yes, why didn’t you do that?’ She put a handful of drops back into the container. They’d have to be binned, and the container washed, anyway.

Josh shrugged. ‘No time to think.’

Smiling, she looked across at him. The door to the larder was ajar and a slither of light from the bakery seeped through,

highlighting Josh's face. Lowering her head again, she reached under the shelf to scoop up the stray chocolate drops which had scattered under there. 'I can't quite reach them. I can feel there're more under here, but they're too far back.'

'Let me.' Leaning forward, he pushed his arm under the shelf and pulled it out again.

'Thanks.'

'Got them.' Just as he straightened up again, his head collided with hers.

'Ouch.'

'Sorry.' Tipping the chocolate drops from his hand into the container, he reached his hand to her forehead, running his fingers across her skin. Leaning forward, he kissed her on the forehead.

Looking up at him, she looked into his eyes before leaning forward, their lips touching.

'Are you sure you don't need any help in there, Tammy?' Ian called again.

Glancing down, Tammy grinned, her shoulders shaking as she tried not to laugh. 'It's all good, thanks. Almost finished.'

'Okay.'

She waited until Ian and Elsie's conversation started up again before meeting Josh's gaze once more and pecking him on the lips before standing up and making her way back into the bakery.

'Got them all?'

'Yes.' Tammy patted the container in her arms.

'What about the flour?' Ian frowned.

'Oh right, of course. The flour.' turning back, Tammy headed back to the larder.

Chapter Fifteen



Tammy leaned the wooden spoon against the mixing bowl and yawned into her elbow.

‘Are you tired, love?’ Elsie looked up from where she was putting some rolls into the oven.

‘Shattered.’

‘I’ll make us some coffee if you like? Or did you want to go and have a lie-down? You do know you don’t have to help out with the morning’s baking. I don’t expect any of my volunteers to get up so early.’ Elsie straightened her back and closed the oven door. ‘Your trip down here is as much about you having a holiday from normal life and routine. You don’t want to go back more exhausted than when you arrived.

‘I’m okay, thanks. I like getting up early and helping.’ Tammy stifled another yawn. It was her own fault she was so tired. She and Josh had spent the evening chatting on the beach, unaware of the time.

‘I’ll grab the coffees.’ Teresa finished sliding freshly baked pasties onto the cooling rack.

‘Okay, thanks love.’ Elsie stopped by the shelves at the back of the kitchen and began rummaging through a pile of papers before looking down and pinching the bridge of her nose.

‘Everything okay?’ Teresa looked over at her, cafetière in hand.

‘Yes, love. I was just looking for a list I’d written. I’d planned everything we needed to bake for Ian’s party tomorrow and I can’t find it anywhere. I’m sure I hid it beneath these papers up here.’

‘Oh, I think I’ve seen that.’ Teresa lowered the cafetière to the work surface and joined Elsie at the back of the kitchen. ‘I

think it had been slipped inside the diary. Yep, here you go.'

'Oh, thanks, love.' Taking the piece of paper from Teresa's hand, Elsie unfolded it and laid it on the table, smoothing out the creases.

'Wow, that looks a lot.' Teresa leaned across, reading it.

'I know, but we could potentially have most of the bay turning up at different times throughout the evening. Everyone knows Ian and the last thing I want is for people to arrive and there be only scraps of food left.' Elsie frowned.

'That's true. I keep thinking it's just going to be the bakery family, but of course, others are likely to want to come and celebrate his retirement with him.' Teresa nodded.

'Yes, and I know it's more work for us, but I hope they do. For Ian.'

'I'm sure they will, and I'm sure the party will be a roaring success.'

'Oh, I do hope so. Ian only deserves the best after dedicating his working life to keeping our waters safe. '

'And he'll have the best.' Teresa wrapped her arm around Elsie's shoulder and smiled. 'In fact, by luck, I think Molly mentioned they didn't have any clients booked in for today, so they were free to help prepare for the party.'

'Really? Well, that is music to my ears. What with Brooke being off still, maybe Molly could help Diane and Wendy could join us back here to help bake the party food.' Elsie smiled and tapped her fingers against the list. 'Yes, that could work.'

'There you go, then. Everything's sorted.' Teresa grinned and returned to making the coffees.

'Oh, but what about the decorating? I can't expect poor Josh to be lumbered with it all. He's got his own work to do.'

'I can go round and help him after the bakery closes.' Tammy poured sugar into the bowl.

'No, I can't ask you to do that. You're tired already.'

‘Honestly, it’s fine. I’d like to.’ Tammy nodded.

‘Really? He’s a good man Josh is, isn’t he?’

‘He sure is.’ Tammy could feel a smile stretching at the corners of her mouth. She’d had so much fun the past few days that any doubts she’d had about not trusting another man again had all but disappeared.

Elsie smiled and nodded. ‘You suit each other.’

Tammy grinned a little harder. Elsie was right. They seemed to. ‘Thanks.’



TAMMY PAUSED AND LOOKED down at the sea lapping at the rocks against the edge of the rocky pathway across to the lighthouse. She wished she’d taken the time to change into her trainers instead of keeping on her comfy ballet pumps she’d been wearing all day, but she’d been so eager to see Josh before everyone else arrived to help with the decorations that she’d rushed out of the bakery shortly after closing time without thinking.

‘Hey, careful in those shoes. They don’t look as though they’ve got any grip at all.’ Josh’s voice wafted towards her.

Looking up, she grinned as she watched him walking towards her, his strides across the rocky path confident and self-assured. She took his out-stretched hand and closed her fingers around his. ‘Thanks. No, they haven’t. I completely forgot to change into my trainers.’

‘Well, just go careful.’ Holding her hand to the end of the pathway, he pulled her into the lighthouse and wrapped his arms around her. ‘It’s good to see you.’

‘Good to see you too.’ She frowned as she looked into his eyes. ‘Is everything okay? You look as tired as I feel.’

‘Yes, no.’ He shrugged and closed the door behind them.

‘What’s happened?’ Reaching her hand to his face, she cupped his cheek. ‘You don’t look as though you got an ounce of sleep last night.’

‘That’s probably because I didn’t.’ He grimaced. ‘It’s nothing.’

‘It’s clearly not nothing. What’s happened?’

Holding her hand against his cheek, he frowned. ‘I had a phone call last night, shortly after I’d walked you back to the bakery.’

‘Is someone hurt? Is it your family? Has something happened?’

‘No, no, nothing like that. It’s just...’ He stopped short as a loud knock rang through the room. ‘Oh, I’d better get that.’

‘Ah, that’ll be Diane, Lauren, Wendy and Molly. They said they’d pop by to help.’ Tammy watched as he opened the door and, sure enough, Diane, Lauren, Molly and Wendy stepped inside. What had he been going to tell her? Something must be wrong for him to have spent the night tossing and turning.

‘Evening. Let’s get this party started!’ Diane grinned.

‘It’s not the party today.’ Lauren laughed.

‘Oh I know, but it’s the eve of the party and we might as well put some music on and have a party to prepare for the party. A prep party if you like.’ Diane walked across to the radio and turned the volume up. ‘How’s that?’

‘That’s good.’ Josh smiled. ‘I’ll go and get the boxes of decorations.’

‘I’ll help.’ Following him up the stairs, Tammy paused in the doorway of the spare bedroom. ‘This is where all the boxes went, then.’

‘Ah, yes.’ Josh made his way into the room, stepping around piles of moving boxes until he picked up the stack of boxes she’d carried up here from the bakery.

She touched his elbow as he walked past her. ‘Are you sure everything’s okay?’

‘Yes, it is.’ Leaning across, he pecked her on the cheek before carrying the boxes down the stairs.

‘Ooh, how many decorations have we got?’ Lauren widened her eyes at the sight of the stack of boxes.

‘Haha, yes, Elsie warned us she’d gone a little overboard, but she said we don’t have to use everything.’ Molly laughed as she took the box on top of the stack in Josh’s arms from him.

‘Do you know which ones she wanted us to use? Or just a combination of them?’ Lauren lifted the lid and pulled out a string of brightly coloured bunting.

‘I don’t think she minds.’ Diane took one end of the bunting and began unravelling it. ‘She’s going to try to pop by later if she can get away from Ian without looking too suspicious.’

Tammy pulled a string of fairy lights from the box and looked around. ‘Have you got a stepladder?’

‘Umm, no I don’t. Or not that I’ve found yet, anyway.’ Josh glanced around the room and picked up a dining chair. ‘Here, will this do?’

‘Perfect, thanks.’ Placing the chair down, Tammy clambered on top of it and stretched up towards the top of the curtain pole. If she could wrap the string of fairy lights around it, they’d really light up the room. She wasn’t quite there yet though. She stretched a little further, the chair tilting onto two legs.

‘Careful there.’ Reaching up, Josh cupped her elbow, steadying her.

‘Thanks.’ Smiling, she looked down at him. He looked happy enough and seemed to be enjoying helping decorate his new home. Hopefully, whatever had kept him up all night had been sorted now. Yes, he would have told her if it had been anything important.

‘Hi!’ Teresa walked into the lighthouse, followed by her three children.

‘Teresa! Hi, I didn’t know you lot were coming.’ Diane rushed across to them.

‘Yep. The kids are desperate to help decorate.’ She ushered Pippa, Toby and Rueben inside and indicated the long trail of paper they were carefully carrying. ‘They’ve made Ian a banner.’

‘It’s a happy tired banner, and it says happy tired on it.’ Pippa held up the middle of the banner.

‘Retirement not tired. Grampy Ian isn’t tired, he’s just going to help Nana Elsie in the bakery.’ Rueben whispered to his little sister.

‘That’s what I said, retirement.’ Pippa pouted before continuing. ‘We decorated one piece of paper for each letter and Rueben cut it into triangles because he’s super good at cutting, isn’t he, Mummy?’

‘He certainly is.’ Teresa grinned and ruffled Rueben’s hair.

‘Brilliant. Every party needs a banner! And I’m sure I saw some blu-tack around here somewhere.’ Diane turned and rummaged through decorations strewn across the coffee table before holding up the small cardboard packet of blu-tack.

‘Oh yay! We’ve lost ours at home so we couldn’t bring any, so it’s super good that you’ve got some we can use.’ Pippa turned to her mum. ‘Do you think we’ll need all of it, Mummy? We don’t want it falling down on top of Grampy Ian’s head.’ Pippa giggled. ‘That would be funny.’

Teresa shook her head. ‘I don’t think we’ll need to use all of it. We’ll need it to stick the other decorations up, too.’

‘Now, where do you think it would look best?’ Josh spun around slowly in the middle of the room, his hands on his hips and his expression serious.

‘Umm, by the door? No, Grampy Ian won’t see it straight away if it’s by the door and we want him to see it straight away, don’t we? Or he won’t know it’s his tired party.’ Pippa turned around before quickly turning back as the wool holding the paper bunting together began stretching.

‘That’s true.’ Josh placed his finger on his chin, thinking before indicating the back wall next to the archway through to

the kitchen. 'How about on this wall, then? It'll be the first thing he notices if we put it up there.'

'Yes, yes. I like it there. Let's put it up there.' Pippa began walking across to the wall before standing still and looking at her brothers. 'Come on, or it'll break and if it breaks, we'll have to make another one.'

Chapter Sixteen



Elsie leaned against the counter, the tables in the middle of the bakery strewn with cake boxes and covered trays full of pastries, doughnuts and cookies. ‘I think that’s it. Can anyone think of anything I’ve forgotten?’

Tammy looked around the room. Molly and Jude, Diane and Harry, and Lauren and Charlie had all returned after the bakery had closed for the day to help take the food across to the lighthouse.

‘I think you’ve got it all. This lot could feed the whole bay for a fortnight.’ Diane grinned.

‘Oh, you don’t think I’ve gone overboard, do you, love?’ Elsie frowned as she looked across at Diane.

‘Not at all. I think it’s great. It means that however many people turn up tonight, they won’t be going home with empty stomachs.’ Diane joined Elsie by the counter.

‘Yes, yes, you’re right. This has got to be enough.’ Elsie picked up her list from the counter. ‘I’ll just check the list to make sure I’ve not forgotten anything, and then we’ll be ready.’

‘Yes, what time is Ian back? Is Ollie still bringing him to the lighthouse?’ Diane began piling a stack of cake boxes into Harry’s outstretched arms.

‘Yes. Ollie has him over at Trestow asking his advice about something or other at the kitchen shop and Josh will ring Ian and ask him to pop over to help him with something at the lighthouse in an hour’s time.’ Elsie picked up her sparkly cardigan from the counter and slipped it on.

‘So, we have an hour to get all this food to the lighthouse and set up?’ Jude nodded. ‘We can do that.’

‘Yes, but we’ve also got to get everyone in place to surprise him.’ Elsie picked up her keys before taking a couple of trays.

‘Josh messaged a few minutes ago to say that people had started to arrive already.’ Tammy held up her phone.

‘Oh, that is good. We want everyone to get there early so Ian doesn’t see people traipsing across the causeway and give the surprise away.’

‘Right, let’s get this party food on the road then!’ Diane grinned as she turned from Harry and began loading other people’s arms with cake boxes and trays until the tables were empty.

With a pile of cake boxes in her arms, Tammy stepped out onto the cobbles and waited until Elsie had locked up before falling into step with her.

‘I can’t wait to see Ian’s face when he opens the door to the lighthouse and sees everyone there. I’ve told him we’ll just celebrate his retirement quietly with a meal down the pub, so I don’t think he expects a thing.’ Elsie smiled as they made their way down the steps to the beach.

‘It’ll be brilliant then.’

‘Yes, I hope that it will.’ Elsie nodded. ‘And Josh has been a real star in letting us use the lighthouse, even though he’s all moved in now.’

Tammy grinned.

‘He’s a good lad, he is.’ Elsie paused and shifted the trays in her hands a little before continuing. ‘How are things going with you both? You seem happy?’

‘I am.’ She shrugged. ‘And honestly, it’s been brilliant so far. We have so much fun together and are so similar in a lot of ways.’

‘Aw, love, I’m pleased for you.’

‘Thanks.’ Looking ahead, Tammy squinted into the distance. ‘Are there people lined up along the pathway to the lighthouse?’

Elsie tilted her head. ‘Yes, I think there is. I wonder what they’re all up to.’

Diane squealed. ‘I think I know. I mentioned to Teresa that I was worried about us carrying all of this across to the lighthouse with the rocks being so slippery and she said she’d try to sort something out. She must have got everyone together to form a conveyor belt to pass the food along to the lighthouse.’

‘Haha, that’s a brilliant idea.’ Lauren laughed.

‘Oh, it really is.’ Elsie used her shoulder to wipe at a tear running down her cheek. ‘It makes me feel so touched to know how many people care for Ian and are willing to help celebrate his retirement.’

‘Aw, Elsie. You can’t be crying happy tears already!’ Diane grinned. ‘I hope you’ve brought plenty of tissues?’

Elsie chuckled. ‘What do you think my handbag is for?’



‘SHHH...’ JUMPING OUT from her hiding place behind the sofa, Pippa stood in the middle of the room and held her forefinger against her lips. ‘Grampy Ian will hear us if we’re not really really quiet.’

‘Sorry, Pippa. We will be.’ Harry chuckled as he turned to Diane and raised his eyebrows.

‘Oi! It was you chatting with Owen. Nothing to do with me.’ Diane shrugged and laughed.

‘Shhh!’ Pippa spun around in the middle of the room, looking at the crowd of people either hiding behind the sofa and curtains or standing silently against the walls before going into the kitchen and shhing the group of people huddling in there.

‘Ooh, here they come. Everyone duck down and I’ll turn off the lights.’ Elsie stepped back from where she’d been peeking out of the window and flicked the light switch.

Tammy reached down and slid her hand into Josh's, waiting for him to interlock his fingers through hers. They were standing to the side of the door so that they'd be hidden when Ian and Ollie opened it. Looking up at him, she smiled. He still looked tired, which had meant he hadn't had a good night's sleep last night either. Something was definitely wrong, but she couldn't very well force him to tell her. All she could do was to be there for him when he was ready to.

Glancing down at her, Josh kissed her on the top of her head before looking back up.

Silence swept across the room as the front door opened and Ian stepped through. His eyes focused on Ollie behind him as they spoke. The hush continued until Ian stopped talking and turned around. After seemingly being completely oblivious to the forty or so people hiding in his former home, he froze as people jumped out from their hiding places and filled the living room, pulling party poppers, smoke filling the air and streams of brightly coloured strips of paper falling down around him.

‘Surprise!’

Bringing his hands to his cheeks, Ian stumbled back as Ollie shot out his hand to steady him. Finding his balance again, a large grin spread across his face.

‘Surprise, Grampy Ian! Happy Tired Day!’ Pippa ran towards him, taking his hand and pointing at the banner she, Rueben and Toby had created. ‘Look at the banner we made you.’

‘Oh wow! That’s amazing. The perfect creation. Thank you, Pippa.’ He searched the crowds for Rueben and Toby and grinned at them. ‘Thank you, boys.’

‘Do you like it? Do you?’ Pippa danced from foot to foot.

‘I absolutely love it, sweetheart.’ Ian smiled at her before turning to Elsie and taking her hands in his. ‘I’m guessing this is your doing?’

Smiling, she shrugged. ‘We all wanted to give you a proper celebration to mark your retirement.’

‘Thank you, my love.’ Leaning forward, he pecked her on the cheek before turning to the people crowding around him. ‘Thank you so much for all of this, everyone. It really is a wonderful surprise.’

Chapter Seventeen



With a plate piled with a selection of treats and a glass of fizz in her hands, Tammy weaved between people through the crowded living room. Where had Josh disappeared to?

‘Did you make these, Tammy? They’re delicious.’ Carmen patted her on the arm and nodded towards the half-eaten cookie in her other hand.

‘Aw, thank you.’ Tammy smiled. ‘Have you seen Josh anywhere?’

‘I think he was in the kitchen a few moments ago.’ Carmen nodded towards the archway behind her.

‘Oh really? I’ve just come from there. We must have literally just crossed paths.’ Turning around, she retraced her steps back into the kitchen. Nope, Josh wasn’t in here. He must have already left. She rolled her eyes. She’d probably walked right past him through the crowds.

‘Are you okay, love?’ Elsie smiled at her.

‘Yes, thanks. I’m just looking for Josh. Have you seen him?’

‘He went into the living room, a few moments ago.’ Elsie craned her neck looking around the kitchen. ‘Yes, he must be in there, love. He’s not in here.’

‘Thanks.’ Tammy turned just as her mobile rang, the ringtone piercing through the music playing. Looking down, she frowned. She recognised that number. It was work. She shook her head. No, it was her old work. Well, the head offices anyway, not the branch. With her phone in one hand, she balanced the plate on the work surface and answered. ‘Hello?’

Stepping forward, Elsie nodded to her and pushed the plate to the back of the work surface.

‘Thanks.’ Tammy mouthed before speaking into the phone and weaving back through the living room towards the front door. ‘Sorry, can you just give me a moment to find somewhere quiet.’



ENDING THE CALL, TAMMY looked down at her phone as the light from the screen faded to black. She blinked. She could hardly believe what the top boss, the executive manager of the company, had said to her. The executive manager! Had spoken to her!

Clasping her mobile in her hands, she held it against her chest and looked out across the ocean. She could just about make out the lights from a few ships bobbing up and down on the horizon. The night was calm, a slight breeze blew her hair in her face, but the waves of the ocean were calm.

She turned and looked back towards the beach. The tide had crept in whilst the party had been in full swing. Guests would have to be ferried back to the beach in Josh’s rowing boat.

Tammy shut her eyes and listened to the gentle lapping of the waves against the rocks.

‘Tammy, love? Are you finished on the phone?’

Tammy opened her eyes and turned towards Elsie who, having shut the front door behind her, was making her way across the rocks towards her. ‘Hi, yes. All finished, thanks.’

‘Good, good. I just wanted to check everything was okay as I hadn’t seen you come back in for your plate.’ Coming to stand next to her, Elsie smiled. ‘*Is everything okay?*’

Tammy nodded. ‘Yes, yes. Everything is. It was the executive manager from the chain of garden centres I work at. Well, used to work at. I was made redundant a few weeks before I came here because the branch where I was working is closing down.’

‘Oh?’

‘In all honesty, I’d assumed the whole chain was closing, shutting down, you know? But apparently, only a few have been selected for closure as they weren’t bringing in enough profit.’

‘I see.’ Elsie nodded.

‘And he’s offered me a job. He said he’d heard good things about me, and he couldn’t understand why I had been put forward for the first round of redundancies.’ Tammy laughed. ‘It was because I had been dating the boss and when that ended and he got together with another colleague things were a little awkward for him, I guess.’

‘And you told him that?’

‘No, I didn’t. Andrew, my ex, isn’t a bad man, we just weren’t suited. I wouldn’t want him to get into any trouble.’ Tammy shrugged. ‘No, he rang to offer me a job.’

‘Back at the garden centre?’

‘Yes, no. Within the chain, but not back at the one I used to work at. No, he’s offered me a management position at a branch a couple of towns away from my hometown.’

‘A management position?’ Elsie rubbed Tammy’s arm. ‘That’s amazing. Congratulations!’

Tammy looked back down at her phone before turning to Elsie. ‘I don’t know if it is. I don’t even know if that’s what I want to do anymore. That sounds really daft, doesn’t it? I mean before I came here, I would have jumped at the chance of running my own branch, but now...’

‘Now?’ Elsie spoke quietly.

Tammy listened to the waves, their rhythmic splashing helping to clear her mind. She kept coming back to the same initial feeling, the same thought every time she even thought about returning home and becoming a manager. Her voice was low, hoarse as she uttered the words she never thought she would, ‘I think I’m falling for Josh and I don’t want to leave him. I don’t want to leave here. Leave any of you.’ She turned and looked at Elsie. ‘That sounds so silly, doesn’t it? I mean,

my family, my friends, my life is back home, but here, here I feel so at peace. Josh is here, I have friends here.'

Elsie smiled kindly. 'That doesn't sound silly at all. It sounds as though you're listening to your heart.'

Tammy swallowed. 'I promised myself I'd never do that again.'

Elsie chuckled. 'Sometimes, love, your heart is screaming so loud in your ears you can do nothing but listen.'

'Do you think I can ring back and ask if there's a branch closer to here?'

'I think that would be a good idea.' Elsie nodded.

'Although I know he probably won't answer now. I mean it's way after office hours and he literally said he was on his way out of the office, but maybe I could in the morning.'

Elsie shrugged. 'Give him a call now and if he doesn't answer, then you can always call again in the morning.'

'Yes, that's true.' Tammy scrolled through to the last number before looking at Elsie again. 'Is it really presumptuous though? I mean what if Josh doesn't want me to move down here? Things are so early in our relationship and if my track record is anything to go by then it's not as though we're likely to last.' It was a daft idea. She shouldn't have even mentioned it to Elsie. She could feel the hot wave of embarrassment coursing across her face.

'If it didn't last between you and Josh, how would you feel having given up your life back home?' Elsie rubbed Tammy's arm. 'Not that I'm saying it won't. You know what I think of him and that I think you both make a wonderful couple, but as you said it's early days and so it's something you need to think about.'

Tammy nodded. Elsie was right. She knew she was, but it wasn't really about choosing Josh over her life back home. It was choosing the new life she'd created down here over one living in the same town as Andrew and Jennifer. It was about living by the sea and enjoying building a new life for herself. Yes, it would allow her to see where things could potentially

go with Josh but, probably because of her track record in relationships, she wasn't looking at this with rose-tinted glasses. She knew she couldn't possibly even begin to answer the question of whether her and Josh's relationship would last or not. It had barely begun. 'I would still be happy I'd made that decision. I'm definitely not a romantic at heart or anything, I know how the majority of relationships end. But thinking about going back or staying here, whether we're together or not, the thought of moving down here makes me feel more excited than I have about anything in a long time.'

Elsie nodded. 'I had to ask.'

'Yes, thank you.' Tammy checked the time on her phone. 'My ex of nine months has been married for five hours now so I am definitely aware that most relationships don't work. Or should I say, my relationships don't work.'

'Ah, don't be so sure this one with Josh won't go the distance. As I said, there's a connection there, everyone can see it.'

'I hope so.' Tammy smiled.

'Anyway, I'll let you make that call. Good luck, love.'

'Thanks.'

Chapter Eighteen



With the plate of food and glass of now fairly still fizz in her hands, she weaved her way through the party guests and back into the living room. There was still no sign of Josh. Anywhere. She paused at the bottom of the stairs. He must be hiding out upstairs, or else just popped up to get something.

Grinning, she made her way up. She could still feel the butterflies in her stomach from the conversation she'd had on the phone. And she couldn't wait to tell Josh about the call and her decision. There he was, sitting on the top step. 'There you are. I've been looking all over for you.'

Looking up, he smiled weakly.

Sitting down, she passed him the glass of fizz and held the plate between them. Was she really going to tell him? Now? Here with all the people still dancing to the music and chatting downstairs? 'I've got something to tell you...' She frowned. 'Are you okay? You look worried.'

Josh set the glass on the step below and ran his hand across the back of his neck.

'Something's happened, hasn't it? I knew it had. You didn't get any sleep again last night. What is it?'

Leaning forward, Josh clasped his hands together and looked at her. His deep eyes were dull, gone was the glistening sparkle he had when he laughed.

He was breaking up with her. She swallowed. 'You're breaking up with me.'

'Tammy, I...'

'You are. It's written all over your face. That's why you've been hiding away, avoiding me. That's why you wouldn't tell

me what was wrong. It was because you were trying to find a way to tell me it was over.'

'It's complicated. I don't want to split up from you.' He met her eyes.

She fought to hold his gaze despite her first reaction being to run. 'Tell me. Has it got something to do with that phone call that kept you up the night before last? Who was it?'

'It was Fiona.'

'Fiona?' She didn't know a Fiona and yet he spoke as if she did. 'I don't know anyone called Fiona. What has she got to do with us?'

'Fiona is my ex.'

'Oh.' She could physically feel the enthusiasm, the excitement she'd felt moments ago seep from her pores. 'Fiona is your ex.'

'Yes.' Josh nodded slowly.

'You're getting back with Fiona.' Her voice was flat, emotionless.

'She's moving back to England. She's decided travelling isn't for her. She's seen enough.'

'Right.'

Josh held his hands out, palms upwards. 'She wants to get back together. She wants to give things between us another go.'

Tammy forced herself to breathe, forced herself to tear her eyes from him. That was it. Tammy could never compete with the shared memories, the experiences Josh and shared with his ex, the life they'd had together. She just couldn't. She pushed herself to standing. 'I should go.'

'No, don't go. Tammy, please?'

Her legs felt like jelly as she half-walked, half-stumbled down the stairs. Speckles of light danced in front of her eyes as she pushed open the front door, the cool night air a slap in the face.

‘Are you heading back now, love?’

Turning around, Tammy blinked. Ian was standing next to the rowing boat, a couple of people Tammy hadn’t met before sitting patiently on the wooden benches. ‘Umm... yes, please.’

‘Hop in then, love.’



AS SOON AS THE ROWING boat reached the beach, Tammy jumped out into the shallow water, mumbled her thanks and hurried away. She needed to be alone. It didn’t matter where, but she needed to think. She ran up the concrete steps and across the cobbles towards the bakery.

Pushing the door open, Tammy shut it firmly behind her and sank to the floor. Leaning her head back against the door, she closed her eyes, letting the hot tears fall down her cheeks. Josh was getting back with his ex. He was getting back with Fiona.

She laughed. A hollow, raspy sound escaping from the base of her throat. At least she hadn’t been his one-before-the-bride, no she’d been his distraction. Just a mere distraction before getting back with the obvious love of his life. All that talk about them having grown apart, of Fiona wanting to travel not being the reason their relationship had ended. It had all been lies.

Thinking back to the conversation she’d had with Elsie she felt the fierce flush of pure embarrassment burn her skin. Elsie had asked if she’d still be happy moving down to Penworth Bay if she and Josh didn’t last, and Tammy had told her so confidently that she would be. She said she wouldn’t regret the decision if her relationship ended with Josh.

Sinking her head into her lap, she pressed the heels of her hands against her eyes, a dancing redness replacing her vision. She had meant it. At the time she’d meant it and she had been sure, never even imagining for one second that he would go back to his ex. Fiona would be moving into the lighthouse, to the bay and probably straight away as she wouldn’t have

anywhere to live, not after having been gallivanting across the globe or wherever she'd been travelling.

What would Tammy be gaining if she moved down here? A life by the sea, new friends that she'd quickly begun to care for, being part of Elsie's bakery family. Yes, all of that, but she'd still be living near Josh and Fiona. No, they weren't Andrew and Jennifer, who she'd known for years. But the short, barely-anything relationship she'd had with Josh had felt real. It had felt more alive than the one she'd had with Andrew had done in years. Could she stomach seeing Josh and Fiona around the bay? Seeing them down on the beach or at the pub on quiz night? Sitting next to them during Elsie's bakery family dinners?

She wasn't sure. She wasn't sure what she should do now. Would she even be offered the manager job back at the branch near home after she'd rung the executive manager up and begged for a transfer before she'd even begun the job?

Possibly not. Probably not. She'd lose Josh and her new job all in one.

Chapter

'How are you getting on in here, Tammy?' Teresa walked into the kitchen and placed an empty cake stand on the tabletop.

Tammy nodded, forcing a smile. 'I'm okay, thanks.'

'Are you sure? You've been really quiet all day. And you disappeared early last night. Josh was looking for you.' Teresa leaned against the table.

'Was he?' She shook her head and continued kneading the bread dough in front of her. It didn't matter. So what? He hadn't been able to find her to officially break things off then.

'Yes. He was.' Teresa frowned. 'Did you ring him back?'

Tammy shook her head. She'd turned her mobile off as soon as she'd arrived back in the bakery and hadn't turned it on again this morning. Diane had mentioned to her when she'd first arrived this morning that Josh had wanted her to call him, but she couldn't. She didn't want to hear the words. She didn't

want to hear the false apologies he'd give her for stringing her along. 'What time are Ian and Elsie back from lunch?'

'I'm not sure. Anytime now, I guess. I'm glad Elsie agreed to take the time off so Ian could treat her to lunch. He absolutely loved his party and was so touched she'd arranged everything.' Teresa smiled.

'Yes.' Tammy nodded. What Elsie and Ian had was pure love. The sort of love that lasted a lifetime.

'Why don't you give Josh a call back? There was something up with him at the party yesterday. Especially near the end of the night. He wasn't his usual self at all.'

'What do you mean?' Had he said anything to Teresa or anyone about choosing to go back to Fiona over her?

'I don't know. He seemed distracted.' Teresa shrugged. 'And you don't seem yourself today either. Have you two had an argument or something?'

Tammy threw the bread dough back onto the tabletop and kneaded it yet again. She might as well tell her. Teresa, Diane, Molly, Wendy and Brooke had all been asking her if she was okay. They knew something was wrong, and they'd find out sooner or later, anyway. 'Not an argument as such. We've broken up. He's getting back with his ex.'

'What? Really?' Teresa knitted her eyebrows together. 'I don't understand. He didn't say anything like that at all last night.'

Tammy shrugged. 'I guess he wouldn't very well announce the fact that his ex was coming back at Ian's retirement party.'

'No, no, I guess not.' Teresa shook her head. 'I don't know, it was just something he said before we went last night that makes me wonder whether he really is or not.'

Tammy pressed the palm of her hand hard against the dough. 'What did he say?'

'I can't remember the exact words, but it was just the way he was talking. He asked me and Gavin if we'd had a long-distance relationship when we'd first met.' Teresa shook her

head. 'I assumed he was after advice about when you went back home.'

Tammy frowned. Why would he have been asking about long-distance relationships? 'It must have been about Fiona. Maybe she's not moving to the bay straight away. Maybe she's living somewhere else for the time being.'

'Maybe, but it seems strange that he'd ask me and Gavin. He knows we're friends with you. I wouldn't have thought he'd ask us relationship advice about his ex.'

Tammy picked up the dough and watched as it dropped back down to the table. 'Well, he'd only promised a couple of days ago that he and his ex had grown apart and would have split up whether she'd decided to go travelling or not, so...'

'Oh, Tammy. I'm so sorry you're going through this.' Teresa wrapped her arms around her.

'Don't be. It's my own fault. I promised myself I wouldn't get into another relationship and yet here I am, crying over a man I've not known long at all.' Hugging Teresa back, she held her floury hands away from Teresa's shoulders before she stepped back. 'Anyway, that's it. I'm not trusting another man again. And I actually mean it this time.'

'If you need a chat or anything, just shout. I'm always here.'

'Thank you.' Tammy looked down at the dough bundled in a heap on the tabletop. 'I think I might need to start again.'

'Yep. I think you're right.'

Tammy smiled weakly as she picked up the dough and chucked it in the bin.

Pushing the bowl she'd made the dough in away from her, she put a clean one in its place. She needed to concentrate.

'Hi, love.' Elsie walked into the kitchen, closely followed by Ian. 'Did you want to take your lunch now?'

Tammy shook her head. 'Not really. I need to get some more bread dough made.'

‘Oh, okay.’ Elsie slipped out of her coat, hung it on the hooks by the door and slipped her apron over her head. ‘Is everything all right?’

Tammy nodded as she watched a snowstorm of flour cover the ceramic of the bowl.

‘Are you sure, Tammy?’ Ian took his coat off and held it in his arms. ‘Josh seemed just as upset as you are now.’

She jerked her head up. ‘Josh? You’ve seen him today?’

‘Well, yes. We’ve just given him a lift to the train station in Trestow.’ Ian frowned.

‘Oh, right.’ Huh, he didn’t waste any time going to visit Fiona then.

‘Yes. He was asking after you. Said something about having a decision to make but needed to go and see it in person to help make his mind up.’

‘It?’

‘Yes, I think so. He was talking in riddles half the time. He looked as though he hadn’t slept much at all. I did wonder if he was coming down with this bug Hudson and Brooke have had.’

It wasn’t a bug. Tammy knew that. Josh just hadn’t slept, probably because he felt bad breaking up with her to get back with Fiona. Well, it didn’t matter now.

‘Right, I’m going to go and see if Molly and Wendy need some coffee brought into the office. I’ve just seen a couple go in there.’ Ian hung his coat up next to Elsie’s before heading back into the bakery.

Tammy frowned. Decision? ‘Did Ian say Josh was trying to make a decision?’

‘That’s right, love.’ Elsie filled an icing bag.

‘About what?’

‘I’m not sure. Something to do with Fiona, his ex, I think. He said he was meeting her, anyway.’

‘Oh.’ So, he hadn’t fully decided to get back with Fiona then? He’d sounded quite sure yesterday.

‘He said something about a storage unit of some sort.’

‘A storage unit?’

‘Yes, he said he didn’t want to keep her stuff in the lighthouse anymore. That he needed a clean break.’

Tammy put the container of flour back down with such force a fine film of white powder quickly covered the table around her. ‘A clean break?’

‘That’s’ right.’ Elsie nodded. ‘Why?’

Josh was putting Fiona’s stuff into storage? She didn’t understand. Why would he be putting her stuff into storage if she was moving back in with him? ‘Did Ian say you dropped him at Trestow train station?’

‘That’s right, love.’ Elsie frowned.

‘Can I borrow your car?’

‘Of course you can. The keys are...’

Tammy didn’t hear the end of Elsie’s sentence as the door to the courtyard slammed behind her. Had she got this completely wrong? Had Josh been breaking up with her or had he just been telling her Fiona wanted to get back with him? But he was meeting her. He was travelling to meet Fiona.

She pulled open the back gate and raced around to the driver’s side of Elsie’s car. If he hadn’t been getting back with his ex, but he was travelling to see her today, then Tammy needed to tell him that she still wanted to be with him. She needed to tell him now. She couldn’t wait. She didn’t want to wait.



CHAPTER

Running into Trestow train station, Tammy looked at the platform signs. Why hadn’t she asked Elsie where Josh was travelling to? She should have asked where he was planning

on meeting Fiona. How was she going to find him if she didn't know which platform to go searching for him on?

'Excuse me, miss.'

She stepped aside quickly as a man dragged two large suitcases past her. There was only one thing she could do, and that was to try each platform in turn. Turning in the direction of Platform One, she ran down the walkway next to the tracks, pausing under the platform sign and looking around. He wasn't there. He wasn't on Platform One.

Glancing around, she walked across to a woman sitting on the bench. 'Sorry, where's Platform Two please?'

'Over on the other side.' The woman pointed across the tracks as a train came into view, slowing down and pulling up along the track opposite.

'Thanks.' Racing towards the stairs, Tammy ran up them two at a time before running as fast as she could across the bridge towards the waiting train. She couldn't miss him. She was so close. She needed to speak to him before he saw Fiona again.

'Careful. You'll knock someone over running like that.' A guard stepped out in front of her, holding his hands up in front of him.

'Sorry, sorry.' Slowing down, she turned the corner and picked up speed again as she rushed down the stairs. 'Josh!'

Just as she jumped the last three steps down onto the platform, the train pulled away, quickening its pace as it travelled further down the line.

Panting, she placed her hands on her knees and watched it speed away with Josh and any chance of a future with him. He'll meet up with Fiona now whilst thinking that things were over with Tammy. And they'd likely get back together.

She took breath after breath, trying to regulate her breathing again. She straightened her back. She'd tried, and now she just had to trust that he'd come back to her. That was if she *had* misunderstood what he'd been trying to tell her last night.

Ian had said Josh hadn't been making much sense. The whole thing with needing a clean break from Fiona might have been him speaking in riddles. He might have meant he wanted a clean break to start his relationship with his ex again. She pinched the bridge of her nose and turned towards the digital screen announcing train times. Where had he even been travelling to?

Sighing, she turned and made her way back up the stairs and across the bridge. She might as well go back to the bakery now. There was literally nothing more she could do here. She'd just have to wait and see if he returned with Fiona or if she had misunderstood and he came back alone.

Grabbing hold of the rail to the stairs leading back down, she bit down on her bottom lip. How could she have got this so wrong? If she had. She shook her head. She needed to speak to him. To hear it from his lips whether he wanted to be with her still or if he had actually been letting her down last night. If he had actually been breaking things off with her.

'Tammy?'

Looking up, she froze. He was here. In front of her. Josh was standing on the stairs in front of her.

'What are you doing here? I've been trying to ring you all morning. And last night. You haven't answered any of my calls.' Josh frowned, deep lines forming across his forehead.

'I...' She didn't know what to say. Now he was right here in front of her. She didn't have a clue how to actually ask what was going on, what his intentions were. 'I came here to speak to you.'

He nodded as a flicker of a smile brightened his face. 'Really?'

'Yes. What you said last night...'

'About Fiona wanting to get back with me?'

'Yes, that.' She looked behind her as the guard called down to them.

'No loitering on the stairs.'

Raising his hand in an apology, Josh nodded before leading the way back down to the platform. He turned towards her, searching her eyes. 'Why did you run off like that?'

'Because I thought you were telling me you were getting back with her.'

'No. I'm not getting back with her. I was telling you what she'd said to me. I wanted to be open with you. To be honest about what was going on and why I hadn't been sleeping.'

'So you're not getting back with her then? Definitely not.'

'One hundred per cent not. I was telling you the truth when I said we'd grown apart. I didn't have a clue that she'd even think about getting back with me, but it doesn't change how I feel about her. And how I feel about you.' He tentatively took Tammy's hand in his.

'I thought that was what you were saying last night.' She looked down at their hands together. 'Then why haven't you been sleeping?'

'Because I've been trying to work out how to tell her I need her things gone. After meeting you, all I've thought about is building a future together and I think it's time I had a clean break from her, that way I can make the lighthouse mine rather than be tripping over her boxes. I've known her so long. She's like a sister to me and the last thing I want to do is to hurt her.'

'And the decision? Ian said you'd been trying to decide about something?'

'Which storage unit to put her stuff in. That's why I'm meeting her. Or I was meeting her. She rang a few minutes ago to tell me that she couldn't make it after all.'

'Oh, right.'

'Tammy, it's you I love and I want to be with. You can ask Teresa and Gavin if you don't believe me. I was asking their advice about how to make long-distance relationships work last night at the party. Apparently, they spent a few months apart after meeting before Teresa made the decision to move down.'

He had been asking for them, not for him and Fiona. ‘I’m so sorry. I should have stayed and listened to you. I just heard that she wanted to get back and assumed the worst.’

Josh took her other hand in his and took a step closer to her. ‘I’m not like your exes. I want you. I love you. No one else.’

Tammy opened and closed her mouth. ‘What did you just say?’

‘I said I love you. I want things to work out between us. We can have a long-distance relationship for a while and I can either get transferred to the coast closest to you or I can retrain. I’ve never felt like this before and I want us to work. I want to be with you.’

Tammy grinned. ‘What if I said I’d got a job down here?’

Josh leaned back slightly and tilted his head. ‘Seriously?’

‘Yes, the top boss at my old work rang yesterday just before I came to see you on the stairs and offered me a job as a manager of a branch. I asked if there was a job going down here and there was.’

‘Seriously? As in seriously, seriously?’

‘Yes.’ Tammy laughed. ‘I love the bay and the people, Elsie and the bakery family. I don’t want to leave that.’ She took a deep breath. ‘And I love you too.’

Wrapping his arms around her, Josh pulled her towards him and kissed her before stepping away again. ‘Shall we get out of here and get back to the bay?’

‘Most definitely.’ Taking his hand in hers, they walked towards the car park and Elsie’s car. With every step they took together, every moment she felt his hand in hers, the stresses and worries of last night filtered away. This was the real thing and she’d been so quick to judge him by her exes’ standards that she’d almost messed everything up.

‘Oh, one thing.’

Pausing, she looked back at him. ‘Yes?’

‘I’ve got to say you look super cute with your apron on and your face covered in...’ He ran his finger along her cheek and looked down at his hand.

‘Bread dough.’ She laughed. She’d forgotten she hadn’t taken her apron off. Frowning, she glanced towards the taxi rank as a woman let out a scream and sank onto her suitcase. ‘Do you think she’s okay?’

‘I’m not so sure. Shall we go and see if we can help?’ Josh interlaced his fingers with hers as they walked back across the car park.



THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR reading. I hope you enjoyed reading *Sea and Dreams at The Cornish Bakery* as much as I enjoyed writing it. If so, I’d be so grateful if you could leave a review, please.

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If you’ve enjoyed escaping to Cornwall, I’ve written a whole other series focusing on women taking the leap to have a fresh start in life. Books in the Escape To... series:

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- ♥ Escape To... Christmas at Corner Cottage
- ♥ Escape To... The Seaside Ice Cream Parlour
- ♥ Escape To... Bramble Patch Craft Shop

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A heartwarming tale of new beginnings, perfect for fans of Holly Martin, Jessica Redland and Polly Babbington.

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A heartwarming tale of new beginnings, perfect for fans of Holly Martin, Jessica Redland and Polly Babbington.

<https://mybook.to/ChristmasCornerCottage>



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But when Nick, her best friend's ex, comes into her life, ill feelings quickly turn to friendship, leaving them both wanting more.

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Desperate to immerse herself and her family into village life, Molly begins to host regular Knit and Natter meetups, but she fears she is taking on too much and the reality that she is totally alone is ever present.

Between difficult dealings with the local law enforcement, Officer Duffey, and trying to settle her two homesick children into a new way of life, Molly has enough on her hands. So when a late night incident with a flat tyre brings Officer Duffey on the scene, she doesn't know if he will help or hinder her rescue. Is there more to Officer Duffey than his spikey exterior?

A heartwarming tale that assures you that no one is ever alone, perfect for fans of Holly Martin, Jessica Redland and Polly Babbington.

<https://mybook.to/BramblePatchCraftShop>



ANOTHER SERIES BY SARAH Hope full of romance, friendship and small-town community is The Wagging Tails Dogs' Home series:



♥The Wagging Tails Dogs' Home

Life could not be busier for Ginny and the team at Wagging Tails.

The annual dog show is looming, a crucial event when it comes to fundraising and ensuring the volunteers can continue the brilliant work they do.

But their trusted newspaper reporter, who always includes them in his weekly column, is retiring, only to be replaced with a city-slicker named Darryl. And Darryl, as Ginny soon learns, has no interest in articles he deems 'below him'.

Not one to take no as an answer, Ginny becomes determined to get him to meet the dogs themselves. One look at their cute faces and they'll worm their way into his heart.

But what Ginny doesn't anticipate is that Darryl might be more open-hearted than he seems. And inviting him to the dogs' home might be the best decision she ever made – even if she doesn't realise it at first!

•

'A **delightfully uplifting**, cosy romance to escape with. Cornwall beaches, friendship, community, love and dogs - what's not to love about all of that? It left me with a **big smile on my face and joy in my heart**. Woofastic!' Kim Nash, author of *Hopeful Hearts at the Cornish Cove*

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<https://mybook.to/WaggingTails>



♥Chasing Dreams at the Wagging Tails Dogs' Home

The Cornish sea air, old friends, and cuddles with a cute pup...

Sometimes you're just where you need to be...

After a difficult break-up, Poppy is keen to put the past behind her and what's better than some relaxing time with her aunt in the picturesque Cornish village of West Par?

But life at her aunt Flora's Dogs' Home is anything but relaxing. When a poor little pup is stranded at the gates, Poppy takes them for a check up at the local vet, hoping against hope they'll be fine.

And there she meets Mack: the vet who is so charming and experienced with the dogs, but selfish and – dare she say it – money-grabbing with his clients.

But underneath that cold exterior, she's sure there's more to the story. If only she could convince him to open up. Because without him, the future of Wagging Tails isn't so assured...

<https://mybook.to/ChasingDreamsWagging>