



A Big Day

at the

Cornish Bakery



Sarah Hope

A Big Day at The Cornish Bakery

Escape To... The Cornish Bakery

Sarah Hope

Published by Sarah Hope, 2022.

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

A BIG DAY AT THE CORNISH BAKERY

First edition. October 26, 2022.

Copyright © 2022 Sarah Hope.

Written by Sarah Hope.

Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[A Big Day at The Cornish Bakery \(Escape To... The Cornish Bakery\)](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty One](#)

[Chapter Twenty Two](#)

[Chapter Twenty Three](#)

[Chapter Twenty Four](#)

[Chapter Twenty Five](#)

[Chapter Twenty Six](#)

[Chapter Twenty Seven](#)

[Epilogue](#)

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.

Thank you to the amazing readers who have helped me decide crucial elements of Elsie and Ian's wedding day. And special thanks to lovely reader, Adrienne, who made the suggestion of the candles in the chosen wedding table centres reminding Elsie of Ian's lighthouse.

For a glimpse into my life and writing news, please visit my Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/HappinessHopeDreams>

For my children
Let's change our stars



Come & join us in beautiful Penworth Bay, Cornwall

*Volunteer at The Cornish Bay Bakery in exchange for a cosy room
with views across the bay, new friends and the chance to explore the magical
Cornish coast.*

In need of a change to your pace of life?

Want to escape the pressures of work?

Then contact Elsie today!

Chapter One



Switching off her mobile, Evie Phillips shoved it into the glovebox and shut it, the click as it closed more satisfying than she'd imagined. This was it. Four weeks off work. She reached across to the glovebox, pulling her hand away before she opened it again.

No, she could do this. Of course she could. What was four weeks? It wasn't long at all. Besides, she'd be busy working at a little bakery by the sea. The time would fly by. She glanced out of the windscreen and turned the wipers on, watching as the wiper blades swished the raindrops to the side, only for the glass to be covered in a watery sheen once again. Maybe it wouldn't be so busy after all, not if the weather stayed like this. It wasn't tourist season, and she couldn't imagine they'd be many locals in the small bay.

Still, she was here, and her phone was turned off. She was unreachable. The office would have to send a messenger pigeon if they wanted to contact her. She touched the silver ring her nan had given her on her sixteenth birthday, twisting it around so the small, engraved flower was at the front again.

Flicking the indicator on, she pulled out of the layby and back onto the narrow country road. That's what Melissa had wanted. Her boss had been very specific. She'd all but promised Evie she'd be promoted to partner when she got back. Melissa couldn't have implied it any clearer that Evie should take this time to rest before jumping into the role of partner. She was a good one, Melissa. She ran the law firm with a ruthlessness Evie knew she'd never be able to compete with—nor would she want to if she was honest—but she also cared about the clients and her staff, treating them with respect and appreciation.

It was this that had led Evie to volunteer at the little bakery. Melissa had expressed her concern that Evie hadn't taken any holiday time for the last few years.

Slowing down as she neared a roundabout, Evie clicked on her indicators. She understood Melissa's argument; she didn't want Evie burning out, but at the same time, it irked Evie that Melissa was forcing this break upon her.

Evie's work was her life, and she liked it that way. No time for wasting making small talk with a bunch of strangers at pubs or putting the effort into making friends when everyone knew how fickle friendship could be.

No, Evie liked her life as it was. Work, home, bed, repeat. Work was her safe space, the place she felt comfortable, confident. She was good at her job, one of the best. She didn't need to second guess herself.

Here it was, Penworth Bay. Almost as soon as she'd passed the sign welcoming her, the road turned to cobbles, the tyres of her new Fiesta jumping across the dips and rises.

She glanced across at the Satnav. She was here. The bakery should be just about... here... sandwiched between an ice cream parlour and a sweet-looking café. Pulling the handbrake up, she frowned. The bakery wasn't what she'd been expecting. It was larger than the image of a small seaside bakery she'd envisioned. It was double-fronted. Large windows on either side of the closed front door, one filled with empty trays which she assumed would be filled with cakes and pastries when the bakery was open; the other delicately decorated with wedding cakes and images of happy couples.

Taking the key out of the ignition, she grinned. This would not be the quiet, mundane holiday Melissa had hoped for her. If the bakery was double-fronted and provided a wedding planning service too, then business must be good. It wasn't going to be the slow-paced escape Evie had been dreading. Things were looking up.

Stepping out of the car, she dragged her holdall from the backseat and made her way to the door. Although it was closed up for the evening, there was movement inside. Perfect. She knocked on the door and waited for it to be opened. She smiled as a woman pulled the door open. 'Hi, I'm Evie Phillips. I've come to volunteer here.'

'Hi Evie, lovely to meet you. I'm Nina, and this is Rowan.' Grinning, Nina looked behind her. 'And over there are Brooke and Max.'

'Hello.' She held her hand up, acknowledging Brooke and Max as Nina stepped aside, ushering her inside. 'I think I'm a bit early.'

'No worries. Elsie, who runs the bakery, is out at the moment, but she'll be back in a few minutes. Would you like something to drink and then we can show you around? Have you come far?'

'Coffee would be great, thanks. I've driven down from London, so it's been a fair trek.' Evie lowered her holdall onto a table by the window and glanced around. A large counter stood to one side; more empty trays stacked

behind. At the far side of the bakery, another counter was positioned. This time a selection of exquisitely decorated wedding cakes and small cupcakes filled the space behind the glass. The large expanse between the two counters was filled with tables and chairs.

‘Is it bigger than you imagined?’ Brooke smiled.

Nodding, Evie gratefully accepted a mug of steaming coffee from Nina. ‘Thank you. Yes, it is. I assumed it would be small.’

‘Same here. It’s great like this though. Lots going on, so you’ll never be bored.’ Brooke laughed. ‘Over the years, Elsie has expanded the business, so as well as the bakery, they also offer wedding planning and here, in the centre is the coffee and cake area where customers can come, sit and eat and drink.’

Evie nodded as she took a sip of her drink, the bittersweet taste filling her mouth.

‘Through here is the kitchen.’ Brooke pushed open a door at the back of the bakery and stood aside to let Evie through first.

‘Thanks.’ As soon as she stepped into the kitchen, she paused. All of her expectations of a quaint little Cornish bakery disappeared as she glanced around the large stainless-steel kitchen. ‘Wow.’

‘It’s a bit different from you expected?’ Brooke giggled.

‘Definitely.’

‘The flat where you’ll be staying, is just through the door behind the bakery. Do you want to see?’ Nina placed the bag she was carrying on the steel table and held open the kitchen door.

‘Yes, okay. Thanks.’ As she followed Nina and Brooke back into the bakery and behind the bakery counter, Evie grabbed her holdall again. With the wedding planning and the coffee and cake area as well as the actual bakery counter, the place must get a fair bit of custom, which would only be a good thing. The bakery hadn’t been her first choice for this holiday, she’d wanted somewhere busier, somewhere she would be distracted, but when she’d discovered her first, second and third choices had been fully booked, she’d resigned herself to coming here. Maybe things had worked out well though. Maybe it wouldn’t be as quiet as she’d worried.

‘Do you want me to take your holdall for you?’ Turning around, Nina held her hand out.

‘Don’t worry. Thank you, though.’ Evie grinned as she looked at the brightly coloured wallpaper plastering the stairway, parrots peeked out from large green palm leaves, their small eyes watching as she tried not to spill her

coffee. As she stepped onto the landing, the parrots gave way to wallpapered butterflies fluttering across the walls.

‘So, there’s the living room, kitchen, and then, here, is your bedroom.’ Brooke swung a door open and stood back.

‘Thank you.’ Stepping past Nina and Brooke and into the room, Evie dropped her holdall. This was perfect. The room was an oasis of calm after the colourful busy parrots and butterflies. A feature wall of green and cream wallpapered birds covered the wall behind the bed, whilst inspirational quotes hung from white walls around the room.

‘It’s lovely in here, isn’t it? I really loved it when I was here.’ Brooke stepped inside the room.

‘You volunteered here too?’ Taking a sip of her drink, Evie glanced at her.

‘Yes. I’m now staying in a camper at Max’s gran’s place, but me and Nina are moving into a house in a couple of weeks.’

‘I’ve just finished volunteering here. I’m going to be working at the café next door now.’ Nina grinned. ‘I start tomorrow.’

‘Oh, wow. So, you’re both local?’

‘We weren’t, no. But we both decided to stay. Brooke was already living here when I came last month and then I realised my then-ex, Rowan, was living in the bay and we decided to give our relationship another go and I...’ Nina shrugged. ‘Once I’d met Brooke, who is my cousin, it just felt right to stay.’

‘You’re cousins?’ Evie looked from Nina to Brooke and back again. ‘Now you’ve said, I can see a resemblance.’

‘We didn’t even know each other existed until a few weeks ago. My... our gran had Brooke’s mum adopted and neither of us had known anything about it until a short while ago.’ Nina looked across at Brooke.

Evie raised her eyebrows. ‘That must have been a shock, then?’

‘It definitely was. But every cloud has a silver lining and all that.’ Brooke grinned as she caught Nina’s eye.

‘Yes, it does.’ Nina smiled as a voice wafted up the stairs.

‘Hello? Girls, are you up here?’

‘That’ll be Elsie.’ Grinning, Brooke turned. ‘In here, Elsie.’

‘Ah, found you.’ A woman with the kindest eyes Evie had seen stepped through the door and smiled. ‘Oh, you must be Evie, is that right? Max and Rowan mentioned you’d arrived.’

‘Hi, yes, that’s right. Sorry, I’m a bit earlier than I said I would be.’

‘Nonsense. It’s lovely to have you here, early or not.’ Elsie enveloped her into a hug before stepping back and looking across at Nina and Brooke.

‘Thank you for giving Evie the grand tour.’

‘No worries. It’s been nice.’ Nina grinned.

‘Good, good. Well, I don’t know about you three, but I’m starving. Who fancies a chippy dinner?’

‘Ooh, we were going to go back to the camper and unpack, but I don’t think I can say no to a chippy dinner.’ Nina grinned.

‘In that case, I’ll go and send Ian out for the chips while I butter some bread.’ Elsie turned back to Evie. ‘We’ll let you take a moment to settle in, love, and when you’re ready, we’ll be in the kitchen, or else we’ll give you a shout when the chips arrive.’

‘Okay, thanks.’ Evie sank to the bed as Elsie, Nina, and Brooke closed the bedroom door behind them. Who was Ian? She hadn’t met him, had she? She was usually good at remembering names, and especially being as her late grandfather had been called Ian, she was sure she’d have remembered.

Shrugging, she leaned back against the soft duvet and closed her eyes. Four weeks away from work, away from the constant pressures which made her feel alive, needed. She’d never worked at a bakery before. She’d worked at numerous shops, factories and even a children’s petting farm when she’d worked her way through uni, but never a bakery. It couldn’t be too different from working at a shop, though, could it?

She grimaced. Unless Elsie was going to expect her to bake. She wouldn’t, would she? The advert hadn’t said baking skills were needed. Or should she have just assumed she’d need to? This was a bakery, after all. She covered her eyes with her hand. As someone who lived off of the pasta pots from her local supermarket or takeaways, choosing to come and volunteer at a bakery had probably been a daft decision.

Pushing herself to sitting, she stood up and placed her holdall on the bed. Still, it was done now. She was here and if she was expected to bake, well, she’d muddle through somehow. That, or get fired pretty quickly. Could she get fired from a voluntary placement? Probably.

She pulled a photo frame from the bottom of the holdall and looked at it. Her parents smiled back at her. It had been taken on her fifth birthday. The last photo she had of the three of them together. She sighed and placed it on the bedside table. She loved everything that photo represented—family,

happiness, the excitement of a birthday. It was only if she looked closer, she could see what had been bubbling beneath the façade, the lack of glimmer in her parents' eyes, the way they sat, even the way her dad's jaw had been set, the tired circles beneath her mum's eyes.

Turning, Evie pulled her new pyjamas from her holdall and placed them on her pillow. She didn't even know why she kept that photo. Was it to remind her of the so-called happy times or to warn her that not everything was as it seemed?

'Evie, love, chips are here.'

Chapter Two



Yawning, Evie stretched her arms out and checked the time on the small alarm clock sitting next to her family photo. It was 7am already! How had she slept in so late? Back home, she was usually up at 5am just so she could avoid travelling to the office in the London rush hour. She must have needed the extra sleep.

Automatically, she reached across to the bedside table, reaching for her mobile. Where was it? Where had she put it? Sitting up, she moved the photo frame. She still couldn't see it. Taking a deep breath in, she rubbed her eyes. She'd left it in the glovebox in the car, hadn't she? She'd promised herself she wouldn't use it. She'd promised Melissa that she'd take a proper break.

Well, she didn't need her phone, anyway. Not if she wasn't working. That's all it had been used for: work emails, work calls, work video meetings. That, and the occasional phone call to or from her parents.

As she made her way down the stairs, Evie could hear voices coming from the bakery. Was she the last one up? The last one to arrive at work? Taking a deep breath, she pushed the door leading from the flat to the bakery open and paused. Six women huddled around one of the tables in the coffee and cake area, chatting, laughing, and picking at an array of croissants and pastries stacked on plates on the table.

'Morning, Evie, love. Come and join us.' Elsie pulled a chair towards the table and patted it.

'Hi, Evie. I'm Teresa. I'll just grab you a coffee. Or would you prefer a latte?' Grinning, Teresa placed a half-eaten croissant on a plate and stood up.

'Coffee, please. I'm happy to make it, though.'

'No worries. I'll have it done in a couple of minutes.'

'Thank you.' Sliding into the chair next to Elsie, Evie looked around the group. 'Sorry, I usually wake up really early.'

'No need to apologise, love. I don't expect you up at the crack of dawn. This is as much of a break for you as it is volunteering.' Elsie pushed a plate of pastries towards Evie. 'Help yourself to some breakfast and I'll introduce everyone. You'll remember Brooke from yesterday...'

Evie nodded and smiled at Brooke.

‘This is Wendy and Molly. They work in the wedding planning part of the business. Down the end...’ Elsie pointed to the end of the table. ‘... is Diane who works behind the bakery counter too.’

‘And I work behind the coffee and cake counter and also help with the baking in the mornings.’ Teresa placed a steaming mug of coffee in front of Evie.

‘Thank you.’

‘You’re welcome.’ Sitting down, Teresa picked up her croissant again.

Looking down at the table, Evie realised she’d interrupted something. A large sheet of cardboard was positioned in the middle of the table and magazines were strewn between the plates and mugs. Shiny pages torn from the magazines and photos cut out carefully were placed on the sheet of cardboard. ‘Sorry, have I interrupted something?’

‘More like saved me.’ Elsie chuckled. ‘Ian and I are getting married soon and this lot here are trying to get me to start the planning.’

‘Soon? You’re getting married in less than three weeks and you’ve not even got a wedding dress. Let alone decided on flowers, transport, colours, themes... anything.’ Wendy ticked them off on her fingers.

‘See what I mean? You’ve saved me.’ Elsie patted Evie’s forearm.

‘You’re getting married in three weeks?’ Evie looked across at the board, noticing the words, ‘*Elsie & Ian’s Wedding*’ written in delicate cursive writing across the top.

‘Less than three weeks.’ Diane sighed. ‘Elsie, you know how much we love you and that’s why we want you to start planning it. We want you and Ian to have the amazing wedding day that you deserve.’

‘We will have an amazing day—the best—we’ll have each other and all of you.’ Elsie nodded. ‘What more could Ian and I ask for?’

‘But what about your dress? Or the flowers? What about everything else that has to be decided upon, sourced and ordered?’ Wendy bit down on her bottom lip.

‘Oh, loves. I’m sorry, I’m not meaning to be flippant, but it really will be the happiest day of my life regardless of what I’m wearing, or what flowers are in my bouquet. I’d happily walk down that aisle in my scruffy clothes and my apron. With Ian standing there waiting for me, and the ones I love witnessing, I really don’t know what more I could ask for.’

Diane blew a loose strand of hair out of her face. ‘Okay, we get that. And we’re happy for you, but there isn’t any way we’re letting you walk down

that aisle wearing your apron.’ Leaning forward, Diane tapped the table. ‘How would you feel if us girls all got together one night this week and helped you make the decisions so that Molly and Wendy can do their jobs and plan your day?’

Elsie grimaced and looked at Molly and Wendy in turn. ‘I don’t mean to be one of your tricky brides. That’s the last thing I want.’

‘We know. And you’re not.’ Wendy smiled. ‘I think Diane’s idea is a great one. I’ll speak to everyone and see when everyone’s free. If that’s okay with you, obviously?’

‘Yes, it is. That sounds like a lovely idea. A good girlie evening.’ Elsie looked behind her towards the front door of the bakery. ‘I’ll get this cleaned up and then we’d best open. I hate to think of anyone waiting outside in this weather.’

Evie pushed her chair back and stood up. As she began piling the plates, she followed Elsie’s gaze. Rain was pelting down onto the cobbles already. ‘I’ve just thought, I parked my car just up the road on the cobbles. Is that okay, or should I move it?’

‘Just past the ice cream parlour? It’ll be fine there, but if you want it off the road, there’s space down behind the bakery.’ Elsie held out her hands and nodded at the plates. ‘I’ll take those, love. You go and move your car and then we can get you all set up in here.’

‘Are you sure?’ Evie glanced towards the front door as Diane pulled it open, greeting the first customers of the day.

‘Of course I am.’ Elsie nodded to the kitchen door. ‘I’ll let you in through the back door when you’ve parked up.’

‘Okay, thanks.’ Grabbing her coat from the hooks at the bottom of the stairs, Evie checked her keys were still in her pocket, pulled her coat on and braved the rain.

Stepping outside, she looked across towards the beach. The sea was relatively calm and the rain a fine sheen rather than pelting it down as it had yesterday. She took a deep breath. She hadn’t smelt that in ages, years, the smell of the seaside. The air was salty and fresh, hinting at freedom. She’d always loved the seaside. Right up until her ninth birthday. Her mum had organised a day trip to the beach to celebrate. They’d packed up jam sandwiches—her mum had even cut the crusts off, just how Evie had preferred—a flask of hot chocolate and two cupcakes, one each. The car had got a flat tyre just as they’d pulled onto the motorway and Evie remembered

her mum forcing her to stand on the grass verge, away from the road. Just in case. She could almost feel the rush of warm air as the large lorries had thundered past, could almost feel the weight of the new-to-her baby doll her mum had given her as a present.

Once the breakdown mechanic had been and changed the tyre, they'd got back on the road, arriving at the seaside mid-afternoon. Evie remembered running down the sandy slope towards her mum's favourite beach on the Sussex coast. They'd spent the rest of the afternoon paddling in the warm sea, building sandcastles, and writing their names in the sand with their toes.

As the evening had drawn in and the sun had begun to set, her mum had pulled the picnic basket from the car boot, and they'd sat on a blue beach towel eating their jam sandwiches and drinking their now-lukewarm hot chocolate. She'd felt content, happy. When her mum had stuck a stripy pink and white birthday candle in one of the cupcakes and sung Happy Birthday to her, Evie had wondered if life could get any better, if she could feel any happier.

Shaking her head, she walked along the cobbles towards her car.

It had been the day after her ninth birthday that she'd suddenly been able to see clearly, to understand what was going on in her life. Her dad had turned up, as usual, to pick her up for the weekend. Although this time, he'd told her to run back upstairs and grab her swimming costume. She'd done as she'd been asked, excited at the prospect of going to the big swimming pool with the slide that her dad had taken her to the previous month.

As she'd been squeezing her fairy-covered towel and her yellow swimming costume into her pink swim bag, she'd overheard the argument. Her parents arguing. Again. This time it hadn't been about money, or who got to watch her at her ballet concert. It had been different. The way her dad had spoken, her mum's tone of voice. She hadn't understood what they'd been arguing about, not straight away. But when her dad had parked up in front of the caravan by the coast a few hours later. It had begun to make sense. Her mum's words, her mum crying, her mum accusing her dad of always competing, of buying Evie's love.

She hadn't enjoyed their weekend staying in the caravan by the beach. She hadn't enjoyed flying the kites on the beach, swimming in the sea or even the giant chocolate cake with the swirly icing her dad had bought her. She'd pretend she had, pretended she hadn't overheard her parents having words, pretended she didn't understand what was going on.

It had been that weekend, that argument between her parents that had set her on the path to become a solicitor and to specialise in family law. She'd known then that she would never get married. Would never want to find herself in her parents' position, with or without children. Of course, at nine years old, and only just, she hadn't known the specifics of the career, not even the job title, but she had known she wanted to grow up and help people when the inevitable happened, when they split up. She'd known she wanted to ease that journey for others.

Slipping behind the wheel, she tucked her damp hair behind her ears and started the engine. It was good to be back by the sea. On her own terms. She reached across to the glovebox and clicked it open. She'd just check her mobile, make sure no one from the office had tried to get in touch with her.

Nope. She wouldn't. She'd made a promise to herself not to look at it. The office knew she was on holiday. Melissa had promised to have everything covered.

Chapter Three



‘Here, what do you think of this place? They do evening appointments so we could get Elsie an appointment for after the bakery closes.’ Diane held up her phone.

Evie replaced the cake tongs and squinted at Diane’s mobile. A multitude of puffy white and cream wedding gowns filled the screen.

Brooke waved her customer goodbye before turning to Diane. ‘Ooh, look at them! This is so exciting! I literally can’t wait until the big day. I think it’s a great idea. We’ll have to speak to her about it and see when she’s free.’

‘Or we could book the appointment as a surprise? Has Ian got his suit yet?’ A slow grin spread across Diane’s face.

‘Do you think she’d mind?’ Brooke watched as the kitchen door swung open and Elsie walked through, carrying two trays laden with pasties and sausage rolls. ‘Ian’s going tomorrow.’

‘Right, so I’m guessing you’re going with him? So, shall I ring and see if they’ve got any appointments this evening or the day after tomorrow? We can probably rally around most of us girls to come.’ Diane slipped her phone into her apron pocket, picked up a cloth and wiped the counter down.

‘Here we go, loves. Pasties and sausage rolls ready for lunchtime.’ Elsie lowered the trays to the counter and tilted her head, looking at Diane. ‘What are you up to?’

‘Me?’ Holding her hand against her chest, Diane looked around the bakery.

‘Yes, you. You’ve got that mischievous look on your face. The one that tells me you’re up to no good.’

‘Well... I’m shocked that you think I’d be up to something.’ Diane grimaced.

‘Umm... well, just be good.’ Elsie smiled and shook her head.

‘I always am.’ Taking the tray laden with pastries, Diane pulled out the empty tray from behind the counter, swapping it for the full one. ‘Just out of interest, are you up to much tonight?’

‘And there we have it.’ Elsie chuckled and shook her head.

‘So, you’re free?’

‘It depends why?’

‘For something nice.’

‘I suppose so then.’ Laughing, Elsie turned back towards the kitchen.

‘Yes!’ Pulling her phone from her pocket, Diane stepped away, holding it to her ear.

‘I hate to admit it, but I agree with Diane on this. If Elsie was left to her own devices, she really would be walking down the aisle in her normal clothes.’ Brooke shook her head. ‘Besides, it’ll be fun helping Elsie choose her wedding dress, won’t it?’

‘Oh, I’m not sure I should come.’ Evie frowned. She’d known Elsie less than a day, the last thing she’d want is to have a stranger watching her try on numerous dresses.

‘You should.’ With a lull in customers, Brooke leaned against the back counter and crossed her arms. ‘As soon as a new volunteer steps through those doors, they’re part of Elsie’s bakery family, and that’s how she sees us all. She has us all around for a roast every week and she calls it her bakery family dinner. She’d love you to feel part of the family and to be there tonight.’

‘I don’t know...’ Evie looked across at a couple peering at the wedding cakes displayed at the far end of the bakery. It wasn’t just the fact she didn’t know Elsie well, or any of the other members of the so-called bakery family, it was also the fact that she didn’t like the feeling she got when helping others plan their wedding day. Over the years, she’d had various cousins and even colleagues try to involve her in their wedding planning. Probably out of pity. Perhaps subconsciously trying to change Evie’s stance on marriage, working on the assumption that deep down she wanted to get married or that their fabulous wedding would be the one to change her mind that marriage was a wonderful pairing of two beautiful people. She shook her head. All it ever did was reinforce the fact that marriage was more about a big party, a chance to show the world how lucky the couple felt they were to meet their new spouse.

‘It looks as though Wendy and Molly will have their hands full.’ Brooke laughed as she nodded towards the couple opposite, who were now arguing over the wedding cakes.

Evie rolled her eyes. ‘I can never understand why a so-called happy couple who are about to get married end up arguing over something as daft as cake.’

‘I used to think the same. I mean, they’re vowing to spend the rest of their lives together, so why would the flavour or design of a cake matter, right? But now, since meeting Max, I kind of get it. I can understand how these couples get so wrapped up in the day because they want everything perfect to almost prove to that other person how much they love them. Since being here, I’ve learned there’re almost two different sorts of couples, first, there’s the couple who would bend over backwards for their soon-to-be-husband or wife and let them make all the choices and then there’s the other type who will argue over the silly little things because to them, it means that if they’re bothered about the little things, then it’s showing their partner how much they love them. Does that make sense?’

‘I guess.’ Evie shrugged. ‘I’ve never thought of it like that, proving your love for the other person. I’ve always assumed it was to do with trying to prove something to the guests.’

‘I don’t know. Maybe it’s like that for some people, but I do think for some, at least, it’s just that they want the day to be perfect for the other.’ Brooke shrugged.

Maybe Brooke was right, although judging by the angry stance of the bride-to-be and the way the groom-to-be was looking at her, she wasn’t so sure whether their wedding would actually go ahead. Glancing across at Diane, who had finished speaking on the phone and was now presumably messaging the other members of the bakery family asking them to join Elsie at the wedding dress shop, she automatically reached for her own phone. Sighing as she remembered it was in her car, she watched as Brooke stepped forwards to serve.

‘Have you left it upstairs?’ Brooke looked across at her as she picked out a loaf of bread.

‘What?’

‘Your phone? I noticed you searching your pockets.’ Passing the loaf to the customer, Brooke thanked him.

‘No, it’s in my car.’

‘Go and get it if you like? I left mine at the camper the other day and I kept worrying that I’d missed some important call or something. Not that I get important calls very often, but I guess, I’m just so reliant on it now, it felt strange when I didn’t have it.’

No, she shouldn’t. Although Brooke was right, what if she had missed an important call? What if someone from the office had tried to contact her, or

one of her parents? She shook her head. No, she'd promised herself.

'Go on. Diane will be finished in a minute, anyway. Go and get it.'

Grinning, Brooke turned to the next customer.

Untying her apron, she nodded. One quick look wasn't really breaking a promise with herself, was it? She wouldn't use it or anything. Just check she'd not missed anything, that was all. A quick glance and then she'd be back inside. Super quick. 'Thanks.'

Chapter Four



Slipping into the driver's seat, Evie reached across and tugged open the glovebox. It was still there. Picking up her phone, she pressed down the side button, waiting as it flickered to life. It was cold in her hand after being in the car all night.

She looked out of the windscreen. At least the rain had stopped, even if it was still cold. Lying the phone on the dashboard, she pulled her cardigan tighter around her. She should have put her coat on. A series of pings blurted from her phone as it vibrated across the dashboard.

Picking it up, she frowned as message after message and voicemail alert after voicemail alert pinged through. They were all from Jennifer, her legal secretary, back at the office. She knew Evie was away. Why would she be calling and messaging her?

Clicking through to the last message, Evie twisted her ring with her thumb as she read it. The message was asking if she'd listened to the last voicemail. Closing the messages, she hit the voicemail.

'Evie, look, I'm really sorry to bother you, but this is serious. I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I can't believe Melissa has done this. After all the years you've put into the firm. All the clients you've brought in and...' The voicemail cut out; the limited time given full.

What had Melissa done? It couldn't be as bad as Jennifer was suggesting. Evie had wrapped up her caseloads before leaving. She'd pulled in favours. All of her cases were at a point where they were either waiting for a court date or things were at a natural lull. She wouldn't have come otherwise. She wouldn't have left her clients waiting, hanging on whilst she was on holiday.

She'd originally only wanted to come for two weeks. And that had only been because Melissa had insisted she take a holiday before the promised partnership. It had been Melissa who had insisted she take the four weeks, the holiday time she was owed from last year, too. Evie hadn't wanted to. She pressed *Call*.

'Evie... Hold on...' Jennifer's voice was muffled, quiet.

Tapping her fingers against the steering wheel, Evie listened to the clip-clip of Jennifer's heels against the floor of the office until the thud of a door

closed.

‘Sorry, I just had to get out of the office.’

‘Are you in the toilets?’ Evie frowned as the billowing of a hand drier filled her ears.

‘Yes, sorry. No one’s in here, though. That was me. The hand drier turned on as I walked past it. Look, Evie, I really don’t know how to say this, but I really didn’t want to keep quiet until you get back. It would be awful... you walking through those doors and...’

Jennifer was flustered. Evie could tell by her voice, high-pitched, fast. Jennifer never got flustered. ‘Jen, what’s happened? Is everything okay with the Aspen case? Everything went through okay?’

‘Yes, yes. It’s not the clients. It’s what Melissa’s done. Honestly, I had no idea. Not until I came into the office this morning.’

‘What? What’s happened?’

‘She’s made Steven partner.’

Evie gripped the steering wheel, watching the skin pale on her knuckles. Steven? Partner? It didn’t make any sense. Melissa had all but promised her the partnership.

‘Evie? Are you there still?’

‘I’m here.’

‘Did you hear what I said? She’s made Steven partner?’

‘I heard.’

‘I’m sorry. I didn’t want to be the bearer of bad news, but I didn’t want you finding out when you come back. Melissa’s been hinting for months that she was going to make you partner and now... now she encourages you to go away, and she goes and makes Steven partner. I’m so sorry. I know how much this meant to you.’

Evie nodded. ‘Thank you. I’m glad you told me.’

‘I can’t believe Melissa actually did this. Everyone’s talking about it. The whole office is buzzing with rumours. Veronica is certain Melissa and Steven are seeing each other. People are agreeing with her. Everyone suddenly sees something that wasn’t there before. They...’

Sitting back in the seat, Evie leaned her head against the headrest.

‘Jennifer, I’m sorry, I’ve really got to go.’

‘You’re not mad with me, are you? There was nothing I could do. I would have let you know before if I’d been told.’

‘Jennifer, why would I be mad with you? There’s nothing anyone could have done. You know what Melissa is like. I’ll ring you later.’ Ending the call, Evie lowered her head to the steering wheel, the fake leather cool against her forehead. What had Melissa done? Why would she do this? Everything was so clear now. It all made sense. Melissa had wanted her out of the way so she could announce Steven’s partnership. She hadn’t been looking out for her wellbeing after all.

Scrolling through her phone, she hit Melissa’s number. The only person who could answer the questions would be Melissa herself.

No answer.

Great. Ending the call, Evie tapped the phone against her palm. Melissa wouldn’t answer her calls. She’d probably guessed that Jennifer would call her the moment Steven was announced as partner. She’d be avoiding her calls.

Jumping out of the car, Evie threw the door shut and marched back towards the bakery. If Melissa wouldn’t answer her calls, then Evie would write her an email. Sure, Melissa still might not reply, but she’d read it. Evie was sure of that. And that would at least make Evie feel a little better. She’d wait a little, though. If she wrote it now, she knew she’d say something she’d regret.

‘Hello, love. Did you get your phone?’ Elsie looked up from the cake she was icing.

‘Yes, I did, thanks.’

‘Is everything okay? You look as though you’ve seen a ghost.’ Elsie laid down the icing bag.

‘Yes, no. Just something at work.’ She reached for her ring, winding it around her finger.

‘Do you need some time to sort it out?’

‘No, I don’t think so.’

‘Are you sure?’ Elsie frowned.

‘Yes, sorry.’ Shaking her head, Evie swallowed. How could Melissa do this to her?

‘No need to apologise, love.’ Elsie smiled. ‘Look, if you want to get away for a bit and clear your head, I could with something picking up from the printing shop in Trestow. We’ve had some new wedding planning brochures made up. Only if you want to get away for a bit, though. I can pick them up another time if you’d rather keep busy?’

‘No, that sounds good. Thanks, I could do with clearing my head.’
‘Okay, love. I’ll grab the order reference.’

Chapter Five



Steven as partner? Steven? He'd only joined the firm last year and wasn't the most competent. Everyone said so. It wasn't just her feeling bitter. How could Melissa promote him over her? Evie had been at the firm for twelve years now. Twelve years. And she and Melissa had always worked well together. Sure, Melissa could be a little difficult to work with sometimes, but she'd always appreciated Evie's loyalty.

Steven. Evie hit the steering wheel. Following the SatNav's instructions, she turned down a narrow country road and put her foot down. She was grateful for Elsie's suggestion. She'd needed air, space to think.

As she turned a tight bend, she hit the brakes as a man waved erratically from the side of the road. What was he doing? His car was half on the grass verge. Had he crashed? Putting on her hazard warning lights, she pulled in just behind him and stepped out. 'Are you okay?'

'Okay? Am I okay? Just about, I think. No thanks to the selfless idiot who ran me off the road.' The man tucked his shoulder-length dark hair behind his ears and walked towards the front of his car. 'Thank you for stopping. Three others just zoomed past, oblivious to me standing in the middle of the road waving my hands like a lunatic.'

'That's okay.' She followed him and winced as she saw the crumpled bonnet. 'That doesn't look good. You didn't get hurt?'

'Nah, I'm fine. My mobile is out of battery though. Do you have one I could borrow, please?'

'Yes, of course.' Walking back to her car, Evie grabbed her phone and unlocked it. 'Here you go.'

'Thank you.' Taking the phone, he walked a few steps away and spoke quietly before returning it. 'Thanks. I've spoken to the police and they're going to send someone.'

'That's something then.'

'Yes, yes.' Nodding, he looked up as the sliver of sunshine disappeared and rain began falling. Holding out his arms, he laughed. 'Sums up my day, I guess.'

‘Here, come and sit in my car.’ Turning, Evie ran back to the car, slipping into the driver’s seat just as a flash of lightning illuminated the grey clouds.

The man jogged round to the passenger side, pulled the door open, and ducked down. ‘Are you sure you don’t mind? I’m a total stranger.’

‘That’s fine. Get in or you’ll get soaked.’ Evie indicated to him.

‘Thanks.’ Slipping inside, he shut the door just as a loud thundering roar vibrated around them.

‘You might be a total stranger, but you’re a total stranger who has just rung the police, so I think I’m relatively safe.’

‘Ah, yes.’ The man nodded and held out his hand. ‘I’m Jack. Jack Timpson.’

‘Hi, Jack. I’m Evie Phillips.’ Taking his hand, she smiled. ‘Did you want to charge your phone?’ She pointed to the in-car charger.

‘Perfect. Thank you. I seem to be thanking you a lot in the short space of time we’ve known each other. You’ve been my knightress in shining armour.’

Laughing, Evie shook her head. ‘I think it’s knightess and I’ve only lent you my phone.’

‘Still, if it wasn’t for you, I’d be stuck out there, risking life and limb in that downpour, trying to rescue myself.’ He shrugged, plugged his phone in, and leaned back in his seat. ‘I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, what a day this is turning out to be. First, I forgot that it’s my parents’ wedding anniversary tomorrow and I’m busy all day tomorrow...’ He slapped his forehead. ‘And then on the way to getting their gift, whatever that might be, someone ploughs into me after taking the corner too quickly and doesn’t stop.’

‘That does sound rather rubbish.’

‘Yep. And to top it all off, I forget I haven’t charged my phone.’ He indicated his mobile, which was slowly flickering to life.

‘If it’s any consolation, my day’s been pretty rubbish too.’ Evie shrugged and watched as another flash of light pierced the dull sky.

‘You think you can top mine?’ Turning, he looked at her and grinned. ‘You’re welcome to have a try.’

Laughing, she shook her head. ‘Okay, yes, I think I can top yours. I got bypassed for a massive promotion today by some incompetent bloke who’s only been at the firm a year.’ She held her hand against her chest. ‘Compared to my twelve years of loyal and successful, I might add, employment. And, to

make matters worse, I don't even find out from the boss, but from someone I work with.'

'Ouch! It's a close competition. Is that where you're headed? I'm not keeping you from trying to save your promotion, am I?'

'Nope. I'm on holiday down here for a few weeks, volunteering. My boss, Melissa, insisted I use up my owed holiday and hinted that I needed to be rested for the upcoming promotion.' She sank back into her seat and laid her head against the headrest. 'I fell for it, hook, line and sinker.'

'You win.'

'Thanks. I knew there had to be some good in there somewhere.' She sighed.

Chuckling, Jack shook his head. 'I'm glad to be of assistance. Seriously though, that's awful.'

'Uh-huh.' Nodding, she slid her ring off, pushing it onto her index finger.

'Have you spoken to this boss of yours?'

She shook her head slowly. 'Not yet. She's ignoring my calls. I'll write her an email, but I needed to clear my head first.'

'Probably a good idea. You want a job at the end of it. Or I'm assuming you do?'

'Yep.' She shuddered. The thought of walking into the office again wasn't something she was looking forward to. It hadn't just been her who had thought she would be made partner, the other solicitors, everyone, had been saying it to her as well. Looking down, she pinched the bridge of her nose. Had this really happened? Why? It didn't make any sense.

'That's one of the joys of being self-employed. No nasty surprises—not from bosses anyway, occasionally from customers.' Jack grinned. 'I hope they hurry up. I'm starving.'

'Here.' Reaching across, Evie unclicked the glovebox, revealing an array of sweet bags and crisp packets.

'Wow, you take this car-snacking business seriously.' Jack pulled out a bag of wine gums and split it open. 'I'm impressed.'

'I don't like to do things by halves.' She laughed. A blue light glowed through the rain and Evie pointed ahead. 'It looks like the police have arrived.'

'Ah, brilliant.' Cramming wine gums into his mouth, he scrunched the wrapper up and squashed it into the door pocket before braving the rain.

Evie watched as Jack walked around his car, waving his hands this way and that, explaining to the police officer what had happened. She checked the time. An hour had passed already. An hour spent with a complete stranger. Tilting her head, she looked at him and smiled. Yes, he was a complete stranger, but there was something about him, something she just couldn't put her finger on. They'd spent an hour waiting in the car together and yet there had been no awkward silences or anything. For someone who associated small talk with effort, she'd felt comfortable. She shook her head. She'd told him she'd been bypassed for a promotion—she didn't even know the guy!

Taking a deep breath, she stepped outside; the rain hammering through her coat within seconds. 'Is everything okay?'

'Yes, I have a crime number, so at least I can claim on my insurance.' Jack grinned.

'I'll send a tow car out.' The police officer looked from Evie to Jack. 'I assume you're okay for a lift?'

'Well...'

'Yes, that's fine.' Evie tugged her hood up, not that it really did anything.

'I can't ask that of you. I don't even know where you're heading.' Jack frowned.

'That's fine. You said you were going to Trestow and I'm heading that way too. After that, well, I'll be going back to Penworth Bay, but I'm sure I can drop you off somewhere.'

'You live in the bay? Same here. I've not seen you around before?' Grinning, Jack shook his head.

'I don't live there. I'm just staying there for a few weeks. I'm volunteering at a bakery there.' She stubbed the toe of her trainer against the tarmac.

'Oh, yes, on holiday.'

'The Cornish Bay Bakery?' The police officer looked at her.

'Yes, that's right. Do you know it?'

'My partner, Jessie, volunteered there a couple of months ago. Do you know her?' Shaking his head, the police officer wiped his hand dry on his jacket and held it towards her. 'I'm sorry, my name's Simon Groves.'

'Hi, nice to meet you, Simon. No, I haven't met Jessie yet. I only arrived yesterday.' Evie smiled and shook his hand.

'I'm sure you're going to have a great time. Jessie absolutely loved it there and Elsie is so lovely.'

‘Yes, she seems to be.’

A loud buzz interrupted them, and Simon spoke into his radio. ‘I’m really sorry, but I’m going to have to get off. Good to meet you, Evie.’

‘Are you sure you don’t mind giving me a lift? I’ve taken up enough of your time already.’ Jack wiped a wet strand of hair from his face.

‘No, that’s fine. Let’s get back in the car, though.’ Evie glanced up at the grey clouds. It didn’t look as though the rain was going to ease off any time soon.

‘Good idea.’

Running back to the car, Evie slipped inside, immediately starting the engine and turning the heating on full blast to clear the windows. She shrugged out of her coat and tossed it on the back seat.

‘It looks as though you could do with a better coat.’ He nodded towards her before taking his his off and rubbing his face dry with the inside of his coat.

Looking down, she rolled her eyes as she realised her once pale blue jumper was now wet and patchy. ‘I think you might be right. That thing’s useless.’

Chapter Six



‘Thanks.’ With the box of leaflets safely in the boot of her car, Evie turned to Jack, who had carried the box for her.

‘You’re welcome. The least I can do after all you’ve done for me today is to provide you with my carrying skills.’

She laughed. ‘Yes, particularly after putting me through the excruciating task of helping you choose your parents’ anniversary gift.’

‘Well, yes. That too. I think we worked well as a team, though, and I’m quietly confident they’ll enjoy their new fondue set.’

‘Umm, or if they don’t, you will.’

‘Ha-ha. Yes! As I said, it’s a gift with two purposes. They can enjoy it and when they’re bored with it and it ends up in the back of the cupboard, I can borrow it.’ Jack closed the boot and shoved his hands in his pockets. ‘I still think you should get a new coat. November in Penworth Bay; you’ll need a decent one.’

Evie looked up at the sky. The downpour had stopped as soon as they’d reached Trestow and the sun was now peeking through the grey clouds as if to remind everyone it was still there. ‘I suppose so. But not today. I hate shopping for clothes.’

‘How about coffee?’

‘Sorry?’

‘Do you hate coffee too?’

She smiled. ‘No, that’s one thing I love, coffee.’

Jack pointed back in the direction of the precinct. ‘Do you fancy grabbing one with me? I don’t know about you, but after all the excitement of the day, I sure could use a large dose of caffeine.’

Laughing, she nodded. ‘Same here.’ After spending the afternoon with him, she hadn’t actually thought about work. She shook her head. How could she not have thought about work? How could she have forgotten, even for just a couple of hours, that Melissa had given the position she’d promised to her to Steven of all people?

‘Are you okay? You look as though something’s bothering you?’

She shook her head. There was nothing she could do. Not right now. When she got back to the bakery, she'd try ringing Melissa again, and in the likely scenario she didn't get a response, she'd write that email. For now, though? What difference was an hour going to make? 'Just in need of an extra strong coffee.'

'Great minds think alike and all that.' Holding his arm out, he linked arms with her as they walked back to the precinct and the promised coffee shops.



TAKING A SLOW, LONG sip of her drink, Evie rolled her shoulders back and relaxed into her chair. 'That's good.'

'It's one of the best here. I sometimes come and do my paperwork here. The coffee helps.' He grinned. 'I meant what I said earlier, thank you for rescuing me off the side of the road and in the eyes of my parents too.'

'I'm sure they wouldn't really care what you bought them.' Replacing the coffee mug, she picked at her flapjack.

'Probably not, but it'll be nice just this one year not to be the butt of my sisters' jokes.' He took a gulp of coffee. 'I'm not the best at present buying.'

'I had noticed.' She laughed.

'The bathroom shop gave it away?'

'Yes! I didn't know what to think when you dragged me into the there to look for presents! Who wants a new toilet seat or shower curtain for their anniversary gift?' Shaking her head, she grinned.

'True. Maybe. I think I'd be happy with a new shower curtain as a gift.' Tucking his hair behind his ears, he shrugged. 'I might put one on my Christmas list this year.'

Choking on her flapjack with laughter, she leaned forward, letting Jack pat her on the back. 'Thanks.'

'Sorry, I didn't mean to make you choke.'

'No problem.'

'Seriously though, I think they'll be impressed. I still can't believe that this will be their forty-fifth wedding anniversary! It only feels like yesterday when we were celebrating their fortieth. I must be getting old.'

She grimaced. 'It's certainly rare.'

'What do you mean?'

'Staying together that long, it's rare.'

'Forty-five years?'

‘Yes, for every married couple, another will get divorced.’ She wiped her mouth with her napkin.

‘No. I don’t believe that.’ Frowning, he put down his coffee mug.

‘It’s true. Well, almost. Forty-two percent of marriages end in divorce in the UK.’

‘Wow, forty-two percent. Seriously?’

‘Yes, and over half of those are before they’ve reached their tenth anniversary.’ Picking up her coffee mug, she took a sip. ‘Love is just a by-product of lust. Often over before they’ve unpacked the wedding gifts.’

Jack shifted in his chair and frowned. ‘No, I don’t believe that. Love is real. I can vouch for that.’

‘Can you? You’re madly in love then, I guess. Have you ever wondered why that’s the saying—madly in love?’

‘Well, no, I’m not, but that’s beside the point. I’m a wedding photographer and the couples I work with are definitely in love.’ Linking his fingers, he stretched his arms above his head before wrapping his hands around his coffee mug.

‘You’re a wedding photographer?’ She grimaced. She hadn’t seen that coming.

‘Is there something wrong with that?’ He frowned.

‘No, not at all. It’s just...’

‘You don’t believe in marriage?’

‘What gave you that impression?’ She twisted her nan’s ring around her finger.

‘I don’t know. The way divorce statistics roll off your tongue or the way you rolled your eyes when I told you what I do for a living.’ Raising his eyebrows, he shook his head.

Sighing, she laid her hands, palm down, on the table in front of her. ‘I’m a solicitor, I specialise in family law. I see every day what marriage does to people.’

Jack nodded slowly. ‘A divorce lawyer?’

‘A family law solicitor.’

‘Right. It makes sense now.’

She frowned. She made sense or her job made sense. What was he talking about? ‘In what way?’

‘Why you don’t believe in love. Let me guess, you’ve been divorced yourself or you’ve had a nasty breakup?’

‘What? No!’ She rolled her napkin up. Who did he think he was guessing at her past?

‘Divorced parents then?’ Grinning, he pointed at her.

Sighing, she pushed her chair back, threw her napkin down, and marched out of the coffee shop. How dare he assume he knew her? How dare he assume she felt the way she did about love because of her parents? How dare he try to guess why she felt the way she did? What did it have to do with him? She hadn’t tried to dissect his views about love or second guess why he felt the way he did. She had merely stated statistics.



CLICKING THE CAR DOOR open, she slipped inside and started the engine. Could this day actually get any worse? First, she gets passed over for promotion and then, after doing him a massive favour, more than one, Jack tried to find a reason for her opinions. She didn’t have to validate her views of the world. Not to him. Not to anyone.

She pulled the ticket from her purse and jabbed it into the machine, loosening her grip on the steering wheel a little as she turned out of the car park.

Chapter Seven



And send. That was it. The email to Melissa was sent. She couldn't change it now. Not that she thought she needed to. Her email had been quite calm, considering the circumstances. She'd kept to the facts. Not that it'd change anything. Not now. Steven was partner, and she wasn't. Melissa wasn't about to go back on her decision, but Evie felt better for it.

'Finished, love?' Walking into the living room, Evie placed a mug of hot chocolate topped with whipped cream and chocolate sprinkles on the small computer desk.

'Yes, all finished. Thanks for this.' She shut the computer down before picking up the mug.

'That's okay. Why don't you come and sit down for a bit? You look as though you could do with a quiet evening.' Elsie sat on the armchair and indicated the sofa.

'It's been quite a day. Sorry I haven't been much help today.' Curling her legs beneath her, Evie sunk back into the sofa cushions. She could do with a rest.

'No need to apologise, love. Everyone has their own lives to get on with. Different things going on.'

'I know, but I should be leaving it all behind and focusing on volunteering here. I'd planned to.' She wiped whipped cream from her lips.

'Ah, even the best-laid plans don't always work out. Is everything sorted now?'

'Not really. I came here to use up my holiday at the insistence of my boss. She'd suggested I should take the time to rest because when I got back, I'd be made partner in the firm.' Evie swapped her mug to the other hand. 'Turns out the real reason she wanted me out of the way was to give the partnership to someone else. Someone who has only been at the firm for a year.'

'Oh.' Leaning over, Elsie patted Evie's forearm.

'It just doesn't make any sense. She'd hinted to everyone that I would get the promotion. Not just me.' Evie watched as the remaining cream on top of her hot chocolate dispersed.

'And that's who you were emailing?'

‘Yep. She’s been ignoring my calls.’

‘Oh, love. That’s tough.’

‘Anyway, enough of my rubbish day. How are the wedding plans coming along?’

‘Well, I have my magazines.’ Leaning across, Elsie picked up a pile of wedding magazines from the coffee table. ‘I’ve waited decades to marry Ian. In fact, I’d given up the very idea of ever having a relationship with him, so all of this...’ She patted the magazines. ‘It’s all new to me. All very overwhelming.’

‘How long have you been with Ian?’

‘Since the new year, so not even a year. As soon as I met him, I knew that I loved him, but then we became friends, the best of friends, family really, and telling him how I felt just seemed too much of a risk. I didn’t want to lose his friendship.’ Elsie shrugged. ‘It turned out that he felt the same way and now suddenly the day I’ve been dreaming of for so long is imminent and I don’t have a clue where to start.’

Placing her mug on the coffee table, Evie picked up a notebook and pen. ‘I don’t have a clue about weddings. I’m a divorce solicitor so marriage breakups are more my speciality...’ She laughed. ‘... but maybe we can muddle through a few things if you like?’

‘I’d like that. Thank you.’ Elsie smiled.

‘Shall we write a list of everything that you’ve already planned?’ She watched as Elsie’s face fell. ‘There might be more already planned than you think.’

‘Yes, you’re right.’ Elsie shifted in the chair, steadying the pile of magazines on her lap before they fell. ‘We have the church booked.’

‘That’s great. That’s a massive thing to tick off.’ Evie scribbled *church* down and ticked it.

‘And the reception venue. We’ve decided to have it here, at the bakery. It’s such a big part of my life, both our lives, and full of such happy memories that we both feel it’s the right thing to do.’

‘That’s a lovely idea.’ Evie smiled. She might not believe in marriage, but if there were two people she felt could make things work, it was Elsie and Ian. From the few encounters she’d seen of them together, she’d assumed they’d been together forever and learning that they’d been friends for years, well, they might just stand a chance. ‘That’s two key decisions made then.’

Elsie grinned. 'Yes, you're right. Wendy and Molly always say it takes their couples ages to decide on venues.'

'Did you want to write a list of what's left to plan? A list always makes things feel more manageable.'

'Yes, you're right. A list would be good.' Elsie tapped the top magazine. 'There's my wedding dress and the bridesmaids' dresses, but I have a little inkling that Diane might be up to something on that front.' Elsie looked across at Evie. 'I'm right, aren't I?'

'Well...' Evie grinned.

'Enough said. So, they'll be ticked off soon enough then, at least. Ian is going to choose his suit tomorrow and will organise the best men's outfits, ushers and the page boys too.'

'How about transport to and from the church?' Evie tapped the end of the pen against her chin.

'Ian's taking care of that. He wants it to be a surprise for me.'

'That's lovely.'

'Then I guess there are flowers and table centres to decide.'

'Photographer?'

'Yes, I think that's sorted. The photographer Molly and Wendy usually use for the wedding planning has just moved, but I'm sure they've got someone new lined up, so I'm going to have a word with him and see if he's available.'

'That's good then. I'm not sure what else there is that needs organising.' Evie frowned. The list wasn't very long. There must be other things. Weddings took people months, even years, to organise.

'I'm not sure. When Daisy and Ollie got married, there seemed to be a lot more to organise.'

'Daisy and Ollie?'

'Yes, Daisy volunteered here last year, and Ian raised Ollie and his sister for years. They run the restaurant on the seafront. You might not have seen it yet?'

'No, I don't think I have.'

'Shall we have a look through these and see if anything jumps out at us? They might give us an idea as to what we're forgetting?' Elsie passed across a magazine.

'Thanks. Well, this is something I never thought I'd be doing when I came down here.' Evie smiled as she opened the magazine and smoothed the

page down. She could understand how people got so caught up in planning their weddings, everything was so beautiful.

Elsie chuckled. 'Perhaps I should have put a warning on the advert.'

Evie laughed. Would she have come if Elsie's advert had mentioned the upcoming nuptials? Probably not. She normally managed to swerve weddings. Last year, she'd even managed to escape Jennifer's wedding straight after the vows. Now that she was here though, and she was getting to know Elsie, she was happy for her and happy to help. 'There're all your accessories, like the veil, shoes and everything. Oh, and your hair and make-up will need to be booked.'

'Oh dear, I've never been one to be pampered.' Elsie dismissed the idea with a wave of her hand. 'I'm sure one of the girls will be able to help me out, Diane maybe. Or else they'll know of someone we can ask.'

'Food?'

'Daisy, Ollie, Jessie and Connor have already offered.'

Evie nodded and added it to the list. 'I think you've got most of the big things ticked off then.'

Smiling, Elsie nodded. 'Yes, you're right. Thank you for doing this with me, love. I don't feel quite as panicked now.'

'You're welcome. It's been nice.' Taking a long sip from her hot chocolate, she turned the page and held the magazine up for Elsie to see. 'Here's an article describing the different styles of wedding dresses.'

'Ooh, that might be worth reading. Let's have a look.'

Chapter Eight



‘Hold on one moment, love. Are you okay taking these out for me, please?’ Elsie pulled a tray of rolls from the oven.

‘Yes, of course.’ Drinking the rest of her glass of water, Evie waited for Elsie to transfer the rolls onto a cool tray and picked them up.

‘I’ll follow you out with this. I think Wendy and Molly are having a meeting with the new photographer and I want to try to drop into the office, see if he’s free for mine and Ian’s big day.’ Elsie picked up a large coffee and walnut cake.

‘Elsie, what are you up to tomorrow evening?’ Diane held the kitchen door open as they slipped through.

‘Tomorrow? Umm, let me think.’ Elsie winked at Evie. ‘I think I’m free.’

‘Great. Well, we were wondering if you’d like to pop into Trestow with us?’

‘Whatever for?’ Elsie placed the coffee and walnut cake on the coffee and cake counter and turned to Teresa. ‘Here you go, love.’

‘Great, thanks. Annie will be pleased to see this when she pops in for her latte and cake.’ Teresa passed a coffee across to a customer.

‘Good, good.’ Turning back to Diane, Elsie smiled. ‘Maybe we could go for dinner somewhere in Trestow? Is that what you were planning?’

‘Umm... yes.’ Diane frowned.

‘Sounds lovely. I’m looking forward to it.’ Elsie rubbed Diane’s forearm. ‘Thanks, love. Now, I’d better get into that office and find out if I have a photographer for the wedding or not.’

Teresa watched Elsie disappear into the wedding planning office before turning to Diane and laughing. ‘You do know she knows you’re up to something, don’t you?’

‘Do you think?’

‘I’m positive.’ Teresa grinned and turned to the next customer.

‘I thought I’d been quite discreet.’ Diane grimaced as she walked back behind the bakery counter.

Evie laughed. ‘I think Elsie is looking forward to it, if it’s any consolation.’

Diane helped transfer the rolls from the tray to one of the baskets on top of the counter. 'You really think she is? I'm worrying we're pushing her into these things.'

'She is. She was looking at the different wedding dress styles yesterday.'

'Ooh, that's exciting.' Diane clapped her hands. 'It's all becoming real now!'

'It is, isn't it?' Brooke smiled as she passed a paper bag full of pasties to a customer.

'Can I help you?' Pushing the breadbasket back into position, Evie smiled at the woman in front of her.

'Morning, could I have a couple of those cheese and onion rolls, please?'

'Yes, of course.' Picking up the tongs, Evie bagged up the order. 'That'll be two pounds, please?'

'There you go.' The woman placed the coins in Evie's hand. 'Thank you.'

'Thanks.' Smiling at the woman, Evie turned to the till.

'Hello.'

Turning, she sighed. 'Jack.'

'I got back from Trestow okay.' Jack tapped his fingers on the counter and grinned.

Grimacing, Evie pushed the till drawer shut. 'I'd forgotten that I was supposed to give you a lift back here. Sorry.'

'Don't mention it. You helped me out enough yesterday.'

'In that case, what are you doing here?' She looked at the queue of customers snaking towards the door.

'I'm working with Molly and Wendy on some weddings. So, I thought I'd pop over and say hi, and also ask if I could have my parents' anniversary present please?'

Jack's shopping. It was still in the boot of her car. She was normally so level-headed, so detail specific, and yet she'd abandoned Jack in Trestow without a lift back to the bay and she'd driven off with his parents' present. She tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear. 'Yes, of course.'

'We'll be okay for a few minutes if you need to pop out.' Brooke smiled at her as she pulled the breadbasket across the counter.

'Are you sure?' Evie looked at the queue again.

'Yes, we'll have this queue down in a matter of moments.' Brooke grinned and picked up a loaf of bread.

‘Okay, thanks.’ Slipping her apron off, Evie pulled her car keys from her coat and held them up. ‘Come on, then.’

‘Thanks.’

Pushing the kitchen door open, Evie held it open for him. The kitchen was empty. Elsie must still be in the office chatting to Molly and Wendy. ‘Are you going to do Elsie and Ian’s wedding photography?’

‘Yes.’ Jack grinned.

‘Right.’ Pulling the back door open, Evie stepped into the courtyard, immediately wishing she’d put her coat on. Opening the gate, she clicked her car open and pulled up the boot.

‘Great. Thank you for this.’ Taking the bag, Jack paused. ‘Look, I’m not really sure what happened yesterday. One moment we were getting on really well and the next... I’m sorry if I said something to offend you.’

Slamming the boot shut, Evie slumped her shoulders. She didn’t have the energy to argue today. She’d been tossing and turning all night, going over the last few months at work in her head, trying to figure out if she’d done anything or said anything to change Melissa’s mind about her. ‘Don’t worry about it. I’m sorry I abandoned you there.’

‘That’s fine. You helped me out enough yesterday, anyway.’

‘Right.’ Turning, she clicked the keys to lock the car and opened the gate. ‘Bye.’

‘Hang on.’ Holding the gate open, Jack stepped through before closing it behind them. ‘I’m not sure what I said to offend you?’

‘It doesn’t matter.’ Why did it? It was one conversation, one afternoon. An afternoon which had been nice, fun, but... it didn’t matter.

‘Well, it matters to me. I don’t enjoy upsetting people. I try not to offend people, especially people who have gone out of their way to help me. People who pick up abandoned drivers after a crash and help them choose anniversary gifts for their parents. People who seem pretty interesting. People who I’d quite like to get to know better.’

Pausing, Evie turned and looked at him. What was he talking about? ‘You really want to know?’

‘Yes. Was it because I chewed with my mouth open, or did I say something wrong?’ He raked his fingers through his hair.

‘I did notice you eating with your mouth open.’ She shook her head, trying not to laugh. ‘No, it was the conversation about love. Instead of taking my comments at face value and accepting that’s the way I feel, you tried to

guess why I felt that way. I didn't try to figure out the reasons behind your views.'

'Oh.' Jack looked down at the floor and rubbed his hand across his face. 'I did, didn't I?'

'Yep. You did.'

'Sorry.' Shoving his hands in his pockets, Jack looked at her. 'I am sorry.'

'No, I am. I'm not usually so touchy about stuff like that.' She shrugged. 'It was a tough day yesterday, and I overreacted.'

'Your job?'

Evie nodded. 'Anyway, have you had any news about your car?'

'I've spoken to the insurance company, and they reckon it'll be written off, so, yeah, no car.' He raised his eyebrows.

'Ah, that's rubbish.'

'Yes, it is. Fortunately, I pick up a courtesy car this afternoon, so it's not all bad news.'

'That's something then.' Evie pointed towards the door to the kitchen. 'Anyway, I'd best get back.'

'Yes, of course. See you.'

'Bye.'

'Evie, wait.'

'Yes?' Turning around, Evie frowned.

'Did you want to do something this evening?'

'Do something?'

'Yes. I'd say I'd take you out for dinner, but I've got that anniversary thing at my parents', although that's not until eight and I've got to pop somewhere beforehand. Did you want to come?' He rubbed the back of his neck, his cheeks turning a deep crimson.

'Umm, okay.'

'Really?'

'Why not?' She shrugged and pushed the back door open.

'Okay, love?' Elsie looked up from the magazine she was looking through with Ian.

'Hello, Evie.'

'All good, thanks. Hi, Ian.' Evie grinned.

'Oh, it's Jack. Jack, can we just pick your brains for a moment, please? I know you're not on the clock, so we'll only take a second of your time.' Elsie

tapped Ian's shoulder.

'Jack, good to see you.' Standing up from his stool at the steel table, Ian shook Jack's hand.

Pushing the door into the bakery open, Evie paused. A short queue from the bakery counter tailed to the door, and the couple who had been arguing over wedding cakes were back, and by the looks of it, Molly and Wendy were doing their best to help them come to a mutual decision. Meanwhile, a throng of customers were gathered around the coffee and cake counter whilst Teresa served, whilst a couple walked towards a table, pushing away the used crockery from an earlier customer. Ducking behind the bakery counter, Evie grabbed a cloth and a bottle of spray. 'I'll go and help Teresa if you're okay here?'

'Yes, that's fine. Thanks.' Brooke smiled at her and turned back to the customer she was serving.

'I'll just move these for you.' Grabbing a tray, Evie began piling the used crockery up and wiped the table the couple were sitting at.

'Thank you.'

'You're welcome. We seem to have a rush.'

'It's just started raining.' The woman smiled.

Following her gaze, Evie nodded. It must have started when she and Jack had gone inside. The rain had obviously chased the people looking for shelter inside. 'I didn't even notice. That explains the rush then.'

'See you this evening.'

Turning, she watched as Jack stepped outside, pulled his hood up, and disappeared down the cobbles. Smiling, she moved to the next table and began wiping crumbs off into her hand. Where was it he'd said he was taking her? Had he?

Chapter Nine



‘**B**ye, love, and good luck.’ Elsie closed the bakery door and locked it. ‘Ooh, that’s Ian off to get fitted for his suit.’

‘I’m sure he’ll be fine.’ Evie hung her apron up.

‘Yes, yes, he will. There’ll be enough people there, anyway. Brooke, Nina and, of course, Wendy with her son Hudson and Teresa with her boys.’ Elsie rubbed her hands together. ‘Thank you for finishing off today.’

‘That’s okay.’ Evie smiled.

‘You’re off out now, aren’t you?’

‘Yes, Jack’s picking me up soon. I’m not sure where we’re going, though, but I do know he has an anniversary dinner at his parents’ at eight, so wherever we’re going, it won’t be for long.’

‘I’m sure it will be a nice surprise, wherever he’s taking you.’

‘Hopefully. How about you?’ Evie nodded towards a stack of cake boxes on the counter.

‘I’m going over to Carrie’s place. Daisy’s going too and she’s got some pregnancy cravings for cheese and onion pasties, of all things, so I promised her I’d bring some. Why don’t you come on over when Jack drops you off?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. They don’t know me.’ She couldn’t just turn up to someone’s house and be expected to be invited in.

‘Nonsense. They’re both part of our bakery family. You know Daisy was a volunteer and I’ve known Carrie since she was a baby. She grew up in the bay and unfortunately had to move away before coming back and volunteering for a time. You’ll get on great with both of them. Shall I tell them you’ll come?’

‘I...’ Could she say no? She looked at Elsie.

‘Honestly, they’ll love to have you there.’

Evie nodded. ‘Okay then.’

‘Great. Well, I’d better get off. Have a lovely time and I’ll see you later. Jack knows where Carrie lives.’

‘Okay, thanks. Have a good time too.’ Evie locked the door behind Elsie and picked up her phone from behind the bakery counter. Jack hadn’t rung or left a message. He hadn’t even told her what time to expect him. He had been

talking about going out tonight, hadn't he? She was sure he had because he'd mentioned having to be back in time for his parents' dinner.

She shrugged. Hopefully, he'd be a while, anyway, give her time to get changed and pop some makeup on.

Pushing the door up to the flat open, she paused. Typical. There it was again. A knock at the front door. She glanced down at her jumper on her way to the door and brushed away some flakes of pastry. 'Hi, Jack.'

'Evening.'

'Have we got time if I just run and get changed?'

'We do, but what you're wearing is perfect.'

She grimaced. 'Okay, as long as you're not taking me anywhere fancy, as I haven't even got any makeup on.'

'You're perfect as you are.' He grinned. 'And I'm afraid we're not going anywhere fancy. Although maybe if I don't mess tonight up completely, hopefully you'll agree to me taking you somewhere fancy in the future.'

Grabbing her coat, she followed him outside. 'Is that your courtesy car?'

'It is.' Pulling the keys from his coat pocket, he grimaced. 'It's another reason we can't go anywhere fancy tonight. I don't think I'd be allowed to drive within a five-mile vicinity of anywhere remotely upmarket.'

Laughing, Evie covered her mouth. 'I'm so sorry. I shouldn't laugh.'

'Don't worry, that was pretty much my reaction when the garage gave me the keys. I think the mechanic asked me whether I was laughing at the miniature size of the thing or at the bright yellow paintwork.'

'At least you won't lose it.' Sitting in the passenger seat, Evie bent down and lifted the handle to slide the chair back.

'Good luck with that. I've already tried and come to the conclusion that there just isn't much leg room in here.' Folding himself into the small car, Jack started the engine. 'On the bright side, no pun intended, we should be pretty crash-resistant today. The other drivers will see us coming from miles away.'

'Ha-ha, yes, that's true. Maybe that's why they lent you this one.'

'I hadn't thought of that.' Chuckling, Jack pulled away out of Penworth Bay.

'You've not actually told me where we're going?' She turned and looked at his silhouette illuminated by the headlights of cars driving on the opposite side of the road.

‘I haven’t, have I? I guess that’s because I’m worried it’ll be a disappointment.’

‘Really? You’ve got to tell me now.’

‘There’s some woodland on the other side of Trestow, which is quite popular in the wedding business. I’ve photographed a few recently. One at the weekend, actually.’ He shook his head. ‘Anyway, I noticed an injured crow but couldn’t catch it on the day, so for the last few days I’ve been going back and attempting to befriend it so that I can catch it.’

Evie looked at him again. He’d been attempting to rescue an injured crow for days? ‘Where’s it hurt?’

‘It’s his wing so he can’t fly and has just been hopping about. Of course, I couldn’t get over there yesterday, so I’m hoping he’s still okay.’ He shrugged. ‘I know a fox may have got him or something, but it’s worth a look, isn’t it?’

‘Yes, definitely. Where will you take him if you do catch him?’

‘I’ve spoken to Chris and Freya and they’re happy to look after him over at the sanctuary.’

‘A wildlife sanctuary?’

‘No, it’s a farm animal sanctuary, but they’ve got all sorts of animals there. Chris doesn’t turn away any animal. He’s obviously got sheep, pigs, hens, even a cow, but he’s also got numerous stray cats who have made their homes in the barns, two rabbits, an array of pigeons, a robin called Tilly, and ducks.’

‘Oh, wow.’

‘Freya is a previous volunteer from Elsie’s bakery too. Have you met her yet?’

‘No, not yet.’ Evie pulled the seatbelt a little away from her neck. Repositioning it on her shoulder. ‘Quite a few people are living in the bay who volunteered for Elsie by the sounds of it.’

Jack chuckled. ‘There is. Even Diane, Teresa and Wendy, who have worked there for a few years now, were volunteers originally.’

Evie watched as they turned down a narrow lane. ‘I didn’t realise that.’

‘Yep. Here we are.’ Jack pulled the car onto the grass verge in front of a gate. ‘We don’t have official access to the land tonight, so we’ll have to walk from here.’

‘We’re trespassing?’

‘Ha-ha, no, I got the okay from the farmer we just don’t have the track open for the car.’

‘Right.’ Unbuckling her seatbelt, Evie stepped out into the cold evening air.

‘I’ll bring this just in case. A bit of wishful thinking never hurt anyone, did it?’ Taking a cat carrier from the boot, Jack joined her at the gate. ‘You think it’s lame, don’t you? Me bringing you here to save a crow on our first date?’

Shutting the gate behind her, Evie looked at Jack and frowned. ‘I didn’t realise this was the date.’

Jack looked at the ground and rubbed the back of his neck. ‘Well, by date, I mean...’

Pausing, Evie looked back at Jack and grinned. ‘I’m only teasing. This is a lovely thing to do on a first date or not.’

‘Do you mean that? I was worried you’d think I was weird. A grown man visiting a woodland every evening in search of an injured crow, who might well either no longer be here or else have flown away, proving what a fool I am.’

‘All I see is a man caring enough about the wildlife around him to give up his evenings in search of an injured bird. You are definitely not a fool.’ Smiling, she reached out and touched the sleeve of his coat.

‘You’re probably used to men in suits taking you to posh restaurants.’ He glanced down at her hand on his sleeve before looking ahead. ‘Of course, I do wear a suit when I’m doing the wedding photography, but as for posh restaurants... I don’t think we have many around here.’

Evie scrunched up her nose. ‘I don’t really go on dates.’

‘Because you don’t believe in love?’

Shrugging, Evie ducked as they walked beneath a low-hanging tree trunk. ‘Maybe.’

‘But you came tonight?’ Holding back a group of tall stinging nettles with his arm, he grinned.

‘Yes, but in my defence, I didn’t realise it was a date.’ She grimaced.

‘Oh, right?’ Jack nodded. ‘A date it is no longer then.’

Looking across at him, Evie smiled as he walked into a clearing. The light from the moon illuminated a deep blush across his cheeks. She didn’t do dates. She hadn’t been on a date in years. A decade maybe, but there was something about Jack. Something different. He wasn’t like the men who

asked her for a drink after work; he wasn't like the men who tried to chat her up on the tube home. He was different. Kind. Funny. She shrugged. 'I guess it can be a date.'

'Really?' Pausing, he frowned and ran his fingers through his hair. 'I really can't figure out what you're thinking.'

'That'll be the result of years of practice.'

'Of hiding how you feel?'

'Of not going on dates.' She shrugged.

Raising his eyebrows, he nodded. 'In that case, I'm honoured.'

Shaking her head, she grinned. 'So, whereabouts did you last see him?'

'Just over there beneath the ferns.' Placing the cat carrier down, he crouched and began lying peanuts on the ground.

'Is that what he eats?' Whispering, Evie bent down next to him.

'I'm hoping so.'

Taking a peanut from the packet, Evie rolled it beneath the ferns.

'Do you think we're too late? There must be foxes in these woods and maybe cats from the farm, too.' Jack rolled another peanut across the ground.

'Nope, look.' Tugging at his coat sleeve, Evie pointed as the fern leaves trembled. 'Do you think that's him?'

'Maybe.' Tilting his head, Jack rolled another peanut just as a black beak poked through the greenery. 'That's it, Axl. Come on out.'

'Axl? Gun 'n' Roses fan?' Evie grinned.

'Isn't everyone?' Glancing at her, Jack chuckled quietly.

'He's coming. He's following the trail.' She pointed as the bird hopped closer to them.

'That's it, got you.' Jack scooped the bird up gently and lowered him into the cat carrier. 'Don't worry, buddy. Freya and Chris will soon have you fixed up.'

'You did it! You rescued him.'

'We did it.' Grinning, he held his hand out to her.

Taking his hand, she let him pull her to standing, their faces inches apart. Was he going to kiss her? Did she want him to kiss her? She didn't date. She didn't date because she knew where that led—heartbreak, arguments, messy divorces. Not that she was going to marry Jack. She'd only just met him, but still, she didn't date for a reason. She was better off on her own. Stepping back, she tripped over a root and stumbled.

'Careful.' Holding her arm, he steadied her.

‘Thanks.’ Tucking her hair behind her ears, she looked down at the root snaking its way from a large oak across the clearing.

‘You’re welcome.’ Shaking his head, he picked up the cat carrier and led the way through the trees back to the car.

Chapter Ten



‘Are you sure I can’t walk you to the door?’
‘No, it’s fine. You need to get to your parents’ dinner, and you’ve still got to drop Axl off first.’ Evie opened the car door before pausing and looking back at him. ‘Thank you for a lovely evening. Unusual, but lovely.’

Jack grinned. ‘I’m glad you enjoyed it. As first dates, or not, go, I’ve got to admit that was my most unusual offering.’

Looking at him, she twisted her nan’s ring around her finger. ‘You have brown eyes.’

‘So, I’m told.’ He frowned. ‘Although, I’ve got to admit I haven’t checked in a while.’

She smiled. ‘Right, I’d better let you go. Thank you.’

‘You too.’

Stepping out of the car, she leaned back in. ‘I meant that in a good way. When I called the evening unusual.’

Nodding, Jack grinned.

‘Bye.’ Closing the door, she looked down the little lane ahead of her. He had brown eyes? Why had she said that? He would think that she’d been looking now. She looked at the small lane in front of her. She didn’t think she was far from the bakery. Jack had driven past it and up a hill. It could only be a short walk back. Making her way towards Carrie’s home, she walked through the tiny front garden, lavender knocking against her jeans, unleashing the beautiful strong aroma as the front door opened.

‘Hi, you must be Evie? Elsie said you were going to try to pop by. I’m Carrie.’ Carrie stepped aside, inviting Evie inside.

‘Hi, thank you for inviting me. Well, not inviting me, but letting Elsie invite me.’ She frowned. ‘Sorry, that didn’t come out the way I envisioned.’

Laughing, Carrie hugged her. ‘I know what you mean. Are you okay with dogs? I’ve got Winston, who’s a little Westie, but I’ve also got Scout here, Daniel’s dog.’

‘Yes, that’s fine.’ Slipping her trainers off, Evie followed Carrie into the living room.

‘Oh good, love. I’m glad you could make it.’ Standing up, Elsie hugged her tightly before sitting back down. ‘This is Daisy, here.’

‘Hi, Daisy.’

‘Hi, lovely to meet you.’ Daisy stood up and hugged Evie before pointing to a door at the end of the living room and patting her belly. ‘I must run to the loo. Sorry. I don’t even think this little one is big enough to be dancing on my bladder, but that’s what it feels like.’

Evie grinned as a large, lanky Alsatian unfurled from an armchair in the window and bounded up to her. ‘Hello, boy. You must be Scout.’

‘Yep, that’s Scout. Sorry.’ Carrie laughed as Scout jumped up at Evie. ‘Scout, get down.’

‘He’s okay.’ Fussing him behind the ears, Evie grinned.

‘Have you eaten? We’ve just got some pizza, so help yourself.’ Sitting down in the armchair, Carrie pointed to a large pizza box on the coffee table.

‘Thank you.’ After the excitement of rescuing Axl earlier, Evie hadn’t even thought about food, but her stomach began to rumble at the mere mention of pizza.

‘Come and sit down, love. I’ll move this little one across.’ Elsie scooped up a small white dog and leaned back as he curled up on her lap. ‘I’m sure Winston thinks he’s a cat.’

‘Aw, he’s lovely.’ Evie stroked the small dog’s nose.

‘He is a cutie.’ Carrie grinned.

‘So, go on, where did Jack take you this evening?’ Elsie picked up a slice of pizza.

Evie laughed. ‘To some woodland to rescue a crow called Axl, believe it or not.’

‘Who rescued a crow?’ Daisy closed the living room door behind her and sat back down.

‘Evie and Jack.’ Elsie nodded towards Evie and took a bite of her pizza.

‘Really? You rescued a crow?’

‘Well, in truth, Jack rescued the crow. I just tagged along.’

‘He’s so lovely, Jack. He’s always over at the farm sanctuary helping out.’ Daisy shifted a cushion behind her. ‘Is that where you took the crow?’

‘He’s on his way there now. He had a dinner at his parents’ house for their wedding anniversary, so he had to rush off, but he’s going to drop the crow in at the sanctuary first.’

‘Aw, that’s really sweet. Freya will fix him up, no doubt. She’s a vet.’ Elsie patted Evie’s knee. ‘I’m glad you’ve had a nice evening.’

‘Thanks.’ Leaning forward, Evie took a slice of pizza. She had. The evening had been lovely. Jack had been lovely. So why had she swerved the kiss? She frowned as she bit into the pizza. She hadn’t dated in... well... the majority of her adult life. There had been that guy, Rick, from uni, but that hadn’t lasted more than three months. When she’d found out he’d cheated the day after she’d told him she loved him, she’d finished it. He had been the proof she’d needed to know that most relationships fail. Of course, over the years she’d been on the odd date, forced upon her well-meaning colleagues, but about ten years ago they’d slowly given up, marking her down as a lost cause.

‘Shall we tell them what we did last night?’ Elsie stage-whispered to her. Nodding, Evie wiped a stringy piece of cheese from her lips.

‘What did you do?’ Carrie patted her knees and Scout jumped up to her, trying to squeeze onto the armchair with her.

‘We wrote a list of things I have planned and still need to plan in regards to the wedding.’ Elise grinned. ‘Well, Evie wrote the list. I panicked.’

‘But it showed you’ve got more planned than you thought you had.’ Evie picked up a mug of tea Carrie had made her.

‘Yes, you’re right. It helped me see that actually there’s not as much to panic about as I’d originally thought.’

‘Ooh, go on then. Tell us what you’ve already planned.’ Daisy rubbed her baby bump.

‘So, we’ve decided and booked the church, we’ve decided to have the reception at the bakery, and...’ Elsie twisted and looked across to Evie. ‘... was there something else we’d already planned too?’

‘The food.’

‘Of course, how could I forget that. Yes, you’ve offered to be in charge of the food.’ She patted Daisy’s knee. ‘So, that’s all under control.’

‘Not quite. You and Ian still need to decide what food you want and whether you want a buffet or a classic sit-down wedding breakfast.’ Diane tugged her hair into a ponytail.

‘I don’t think we want a sit-down meal. It’ll be too cramped in the bakery for that. A buffet would be nice, I think.’ Elsie nodded.

‘We can do that.’ Diane smiled. ‘Why don’t you and Ian pop in at some point this week and we can go through the menu?’

‘That’s a good idea. Yes, we’ll do that. Anyway, that’s enough wedding talk tonight. How are the pottery lessons going, Carrie?’

‘Great, thanks. I’ve an adults’ pottery course starting at the end of the month where we’ll make ceramic Christmas wreaths. The interest in it has been amazing, so I’ve decided to run two courses.’ Carrie beamed as she fussed over Scout.

‘That’s fantastic news. Well done, love.’ Elsie smiled.

‘Do you teach pottery then?’ Evie looked across at Carrie.

‘Yes, I’ve got adult and kids’ courses. I sell bits and pieces at craft fairs too.’

‘Wow, that must be such a nice job. I’ve always fancied having a go at making something out of pottery. I used to watch my friends who had chosen art at school and wonder how on earth they made the things they did with just a lump of clay.’ Evie picked up another slice of pizza.

‘You should come along to my studio one day and have a go at making something.’

‘I’d be absolutely rubbish. I don’t have an artistic bone in my body.’ Evie sighed. Deep down, she’d always wanted to be one of those people who could create something from seemingly nothing. She’d never been able to though, however hard she’d tried.

‘Come over one day and have a go. Everyone’s got the ability to be creative. You’ve just got to know what you’re looking for.’ Carrie smiled.

‘Maybe I will. Thanks.’ Leaning back against the sofa cushions, Evie listened as the conversation turned back to weddings. Had she blown things with Jack? Not that she’d even considered there could possibly be anything going on between them until he’d admitted he’d thought the evening was a date. Would it be so bad if it had been? If they went on another date, even? Yes, it went against everything she stood for, everything she believed, but she was down here, in the bay, and her real life, her job, her old life, felt miles away. It *was* miles away.

Chapter Eleven



‘Are you sure you’re going to be okay? I don’t have to take my lunch break right now if you’d rather I stay and help get the queue down?’ Evie held her apron and looked at the line of customers snaking their way out of the door, unsure whether to swap it for her coat or put it back on.

‘Go! We’ll be fine, and Jack is waiting for you. Besides, you want to go and see how Axl’s doing, don’t you?’ Diane dismissed her offer to stay.

‘Okay.’ Hanging her apron up and shrugging into her coat, Evie made her way through the small crowd and outside. There he was, in the bright yellow courtesy car at the end of the cobbles. Taking a deep breath, she made her way towards the car. This was silly. Why did she suddenly feel so nervous? He was the same person she’d had fun with in town the other day, the same person she’d rescued a crow with yesterday, so why did her palms feel so sweaty? She shook her head. She knew why. It was because he’d gone to kiss her. Or had he? Was she just imagining things? Had she got it wrong? Maybe he’d been just as shocked as she was in that moment. Shaking her head, she pulled open the car door and slipped inside. ‘Hi.’

‘Hey, how’re things at the bakery?’ Looking at her, Jack grinned.

‘Good, thanks. Busy.’ She pulled her seatbelt across. ‘How’s your morning been?’

‘Great, thanks. I’ve just had a meeting with a couple whose wedding I photographed a couple of weeks ago. That’s my favourite part of the job, showing them the final photos and helping them choose which to have in their wedding album.’

‘Aw, that does sound nice.’

‘It is. It also means I get filled up with copious cups of coffee and biscuits.’ He chuckled. ‘Not that the complimentary food is the reason I do the job I do.’

Laughing, she looked at him out of the corner of her eye. He had the lines around his eyes, the tell-tale sign of someone who laughs a lot. She smiled. Maybe his happiness was contagious. All she knew was that she hadn’t felt this relaxed in a very long time, even her nerves over the intended or not intended close call kiss had evaporated the moment she’d seen him. Back

home, work consumed her. If she wasn't in meetings or running from a client's house to the courtroom, then she was scouring papers, talking about cases to her colleagues. She even had a notebook on her bedside table so she could jot things down when she awoke in the middle of the night.

'Is everything okay?' He glanced at her before looking back at the road. 'You look as though you're thinking about something important.'

She shrugged. 'I was just thinking about how much more relaxed I feel being away from work. I'd forgotten what it feels like to have a holiday.'

'When was your last?'

'Holiday? Umm... five, seven years ago? I don't usually take the time off work and if I do, it's only to catch up with something without meetings to go to.'

'Seriously? Seven years? This is your first holiday since then?'

'Proper holiday. As I said, I'd sometimes take a day here or there to catch up on things. Usually, when I have a difficult case and I need a bit more time to get my head around.'

Whistling through his teeth, Jack shook his head. 'I can't imagine that. I love my job, but I still need to get away sometimes.'

'We're all different, I guess.'

'I don't know. I think it's healthy to get away from the normal routine and worries of life sometimes. It's a something to look forward to, to go to new places and try new things.'

She nodded. He was probably right, but work was everything to her. Her whole life revolved around work. Until now and this forced break away, anyway. 'You're probably right. I needed this break even if I didn't think I did.'

'Well, I, for one, am glad you took a break and decided to come to the bay.' He looked ahead as they slowed and turned a corner.

'Thanks. I'm glad I came here too.' She grinned. She was. 'Did you hear anything from Freya or Chris about Axl this morning?'

'Yes, he's doing fine. His wing is broken, and he might not recover enough to use it again, but he'll have a home with at the sanctuary if he doesn't.'

'It's a good job you didn't give up on him then. If he can't fly, he was lucky to survive as long as he did out in the wild.'

'True.' Jack nodded as they turned into the sanctuary, the car dipping and rising over numerous potholes.

‘Is this it?’

‘This is it.’ Opening the door, Jack jumped out.

Following him to a large metal gate, Evie looked at the huge old farmhouse.

‘Come on, Chris should be about somewhere.’ Pushing the gate open, he stood back, letting Evie through before shutting it again.

Following him across the courtyard towards another gate leading to the barns, Evie smiled. She could hear the noise of sheep and pigs coming from somewhere. ‘Daisy mentioned you help out here sometimes?’

‘That’s right. There’s nothing like being surrounded by animals, no judgement, no expectations.’ He grinned.

‘Who judges you?’ Evie closed her eyes momentarily. ‘Sorry, I didn’t mean it like it probably sounded. I just meant I thought you loved your job. You seem to be living your life as you want it, that’s all.’

‘It’s okay.’ Glancing at her, he ran his fingers through his hair. ‘Wedding photography is a relatively recent thing for me. I used to work in the city, as a social worker, believe it or not. Anyway, about five years ago, I had to step away. I just couldn’t cope with the demands anymore and then my dad got sick and...’ He looked ahead; his eyes focused on something else. ‘I just needed a break, a change of location and a less demanding job.’

‘I didn’t know that. Sorry, I shouldn’t have pried.’ She touched his arm.

‘It’s okay. I don’t really talk about it as it feels like a lifetime ago now, but sometimes I have to pinch myself to remember how lucky I am, living here in such a beautiful corner of the world, being my own boss, being surrounded by happy people.’ He laughed. ‘Most of the time, anyway. I remember one of my first weddings actually where there ended up being a proper fist fight between the groom and several members of the wedding party. Yep, so nothing is guaranteed, but generally...’ He shrugged.

‘Is your dad okay now?’

‘Yes, he’s fine. Thankfully, he’s made a full recovery.’ He leaned on the gate leading through to the small courtyard area between the two barns. Leaning down, he stuck his arm through the metal gaps and fussed over a sheep who had walked across to them, curious why they were there. ‘Snoop, meet Evie.’

Crouching down, Evie stroked Snoop, a little hesitant at first.

‘It’s okay. He won’t hurt you. Sheep are one of the gentlest creatures you can meet. Each and every one of them has a heart of gold.’

‘He’s lovely.’ A bit more confident now, she stroked his soft woollen coat as he nudged her arm with his nose.

‘Let’s try the house.’ Standing up, Jack leaned over the fence and fussed over Snoop again. ‘Catch you later, Snoop, buddy.’

‘Are you helping out here today?’

‘Yes, when your lunch break is over, I’ll run you back to the bakery and come back here. I’ve got a few hours before my next job.’ He checked his watch.

‘You’ve got a wedding today?’

‘No, not a wedding. The wedding shop in Trestow has asked me to pop by and take some photos of their new range.’

Evie nodded as they reached the house. ‘I think we’re taking Elsie wedding dress shopping tonight. I’m not sure whereabouts we’re going, though.’

Glancing at her as he led the way around the back of the house, he grinned. ‘I might see you later then.’

‘Now, that would be a coincidence.’ Evie looked over to a row of small outhouses. She pointed to the far end as an empty bucket rolled out of the door. ‘Could that be him?’

‘Hey, Chris!’ Jack scooped to pick up the bucket and stood in the doorway.

‘Hi, Jack. Cheers, mate.’ Taking the bucket, Chris looked at Evie. ‘Hi, you must be Evie? You’re volunteering at Elsie’s bakery, is that right?’

‘Hi, yes, that’s right.’ Evie smiled as Chris wiped his hand down the front of his jeans before shaking hers.

‘You’ve come to see how Axl’s getting on, haven’t you?’ Chris indicated to a small pen at the back of the outbuilding. ‘Freya has set his wing, but because of the way it was broken, she’s not very hopeful that he’ll be able to fly again.’

Walking towards the pen, Evie watched as the bird hopped about, digging into the straw covering the bottom of the pen searching for corn. ‘He looks livelier than he did yesterday.’

‘Yes, he’s definitely feeling better. He’s got quite the voice on him as well.’ Chris chuckled.

‘Thanks for this, mate.’ Jack shook Chris’s hand, drawing him in for a shoulder hug and patting him on the back.

‘No, thank you for bringing him in. He’s quite a little character, I think he’ll settle in well here. Once he’s healed, we’ll make the decision as to whether he can be released or whether he’ll have to stay here, but if he does, I think he’ll settle in well. Crows are clever little things.’

‘I was telling my parents about him last night and my dad swears he’s heard crows talking before. You know, like parrots.’ Jack shook his head.

‘He’s right. They can mimic different sounds they hear, including human voices.’ Chris nodded.

‘Really? That’s crazy.’ Evie raised her eyebrows.

‘Yep, really. You never know, you might be able to teach him a few phrases.’ Chris chuckled and opened the pen door, holding some oats in the palm of his hand. Axl hopped across and began pecking at them. ‘They remember kindness too, so you two have a friend for life here.’

‘Well, I’m just glad we were able to bring the little guy here.’ Jack picked up some oats and took over feeding him.

Chapter Twelve



‘Chris!’ A voice, urgent and panicked, pierced the quiet of the yard. Shutting the door to Axl’s pen, Chris ran outside. ‘Freya! What’s happened?’

‘A call’s just come through. A dog walker has just witnessed someone pull up along the road out front and let out about ten sheep. Frank’s out there now trying to get them inside. Hurry.’ Turning, Freya ran back the way she’d come, Chris and Jack shortly behind her.

Unsure what she should do, Evie followed them, running around the side of the house and through the courtyard towards the gate. Two sheep had already been caught and were standing dazed in the middle of the courtyard. Evie squinted. It looked as though one of them had patches of blood stained on its wool. Shutting the gate quickly behind her, she looked up and down the road. Jack had stopped a car to the right of the sanctuary, the driver quickly putting their hazard lights on to warn any traffic coming behind them. Chris and Freya were cornering a sheep whilst a man, presumably Frank, led another back through the gate.

‘Evie.’

Turning, Evie watched as Jack waved her towards him. Pointing towards a blur of white behind some foliage on the grass verge.

‘If you walk slowly towards her from your side and I do the same, we should be able to grab her. Real slow, though. We don’t want to spook the poor girl.’

Following Jack’s instructions, Evie slowed her pace as she approached the sheep. She’d never caught a sheep before. How was it going to work? They couldn’t exactly pick it up, could they? She held her hands out as she approached her.

Sensing they were getting close, the sheep looked up, locking her eyes with Evie’s.

‘Hey, girl. It’s okay. We’re here to help you.’ Crouching down, Evie held her hand out. ‘Look, it’s just us. You’re safe here.’

Stepping forward, the sheep nuzzled her hand.

‘That’s it.’ Smiling, Evie stroked her.

‘Wow, you’re a proper sheep charmer.’ Jack grinned as he gently took hold of the sheep, leading her across the road.

‘Hold on, I’ll get the gate.’ Running after him, Evie opened the gate, letting Jack guide the sheep through. ‘On to the next?’

Pausing, Jack grinned at her. ‘Most definitely.’



‘THAT’S ALL OF THEM.’ Chris held the gate open as Freya guided another sheep through, followed by Evie, Jack, and Frank. ‘Thanks, everyone. We did well.’

‘Who do you think abandoned them, and why would they do that? Why not just ask you to have them instead of letting them roam across the road?’ Evie fussed over one of the sheep they’d rescued.

‘It was probably a farmer. Looks as though dogs have attacked them. They’ve all got some sort of injury. The farmer was probably worried we’d try to get them to pay for their vet care if they offered them up.’ Chris walked across to a small outbuilding in the corner of the courtyard. ‘I’ll grab them some food and then we’ll check them out and get them comfy.’

‘A farmer will really abandon their sheep if they get hurt?’ It didn’t make any sense.

‘Not all farmers. Some care and respect the animals that make them a living, but some of them just see their profit margin being swallowed.’ Freya inspected the leg of the sheep in front of her.

‘At least they brought them to us, even if the way they did it was dangerous. A lot of farmers just dispose of them.’ Frank grimaced.

‘That’s awful.’ Standing up, Evie tucked her hair behind her ears.

‘Right, we need to get you back to the bakery. Your lunch break finished over an hour ago.’ Jack pulled his sleeve back over his watch.

‘Oh no, yes, is it okay if you do?’

‘Yes, of course.’

‘Thank you for helping, Evie. And lovely to meet you. I don’t think we’ve had time for introductions, but I’m Freya.’ Standing up, Freya wiped her hands down her coat before hugging her.

‘Yes, good to meet you, Evie. I’m Frank.’ Frank held his hand up.

‘Lovely to meet you both, too. I hope they’ll all be okay.’ Evie looked at the sheep they’d rescued.

‘Oh, they will. They’re in the best place now. Maybe you can come back and see them again, all settled in?’ Freya bent down again to look over another sheep.

‘I’d like that. Thanks.’ Turning, Evie followed Jack back to the car.

‘I bet you weren’t expecting to be chasing after abandoned sheep on your lunch breaks when you decided to come to Cornwall?’ Jack unlocked the car.

‘It wasn’t something I expected, no.’ Laughing, Evie clicked her seatbelt on.

‘You looked as though you’d done that before.’ Starting the ignition, Jack pulled out onto the road.

‘Chasing sheep? Nope. I think that’s the first time I’ve seen a sheep up close like that since I was a child, let alone try to catch one.’ Looking down at her mud-splattered clothes, she frowned. She’d have to clean up and change before she served behind the counter.

‘You’re a natural then.’ Smiling, Jack glanced across at her.

‘Hardly.’ She picked up a bottle of hand sanitiser from the cupholder by the gear stick. ‘Can I?’

‘Of course, help yourself.’

‘Thanks.’ Rubbing the sanitiser across her hands, she watched as he turned the corner. He had a streak of mud across his cheek, right from his eye to the corner of his lip. Reaching out, she wiped his cheek, his skin warm to the touch. ‘You’ve got a bit of mud.’

‘Oh, have I?’ He touched his cheek, his fingers brushing hers.

‘Yes, sorry it’s not budging.’ She twisted her ring around her finger as she watched him try to rub it off.

‘Has it gone now?’

‘Nope.’ She laughed. ‘It’s still there.’

‘Oh. Oh well.’ Shrugging, he chuckled. ‘Thanks for trying anyway.’

‘No worries. I’m probably covered too.’ As they turned into Penworth Bay, she looked out of the window at the beach. ‘I still can’t believe I haven’t walked along the beach yet.’

‘Really? You haven’t?’

‘Don’t sound so shocked.’

‘Well, it is pretty shocking.’ He pulled the car to a stop in front of the bakery and twisted in his seat, chuckling as he looked at her. ‘Yes, you are covered, too. Here.’

Keeping still, she felt the rough skin of his thumb pad as he ran it across her forehead. 'Thank you.'

'Maybe we could go for a wander on the beach later, after your trip to the wedding boutique and my job?'

'Yes, I'd like that.' She nodded. She would. 'See you later then.'

Chapter Thirteen



‘I’m getting nervous now.’ Elsie gripped Daisy and Brooke’s hands. ‘Come on. Let’s do it.’ Diane walked to the door of the wedding boutique and pushed it open, indicating for Elsie to go first.

‘Wow, look at them all! This is so exciting.’ Brooke walked across to one of the many rows of wedding gowns.

‘This one is beautiful. How about this one, Elsie?’ Nina called over her shoulder.

‘Oh, that one is lovely. I don’t think that neckline would suit me, though.’ Elsie tugged at the collar of her coat.

Evie paused in the middle of the shop. Last week, helping someone shop for a wedding dress would have been her worst nightmare, but today, when she looked around at all the people who had come to support Elsie, it didn’t feel like a nightmare at all. Even the idea of marriage didn’t seem that futile anymore. She could see how much in love Elsie and Ian were, and she actually thought and hoped they would enjoy married life for many years.

‘I hope Diane warned whoever she booked the appointment with that Elsie was bringing a massive entourage.’ Standing next to Evie, Molly grimaced. ‘Everyone introduced themselves, didn’t they?’

‘Yes, yes. I can’t promise I’ll remember everyone’s names, though.’ Evie grinned. In addition to Molly, Wendy, Teresa, Diane, Brooke, Nina, Freya, Carrie and Daisy, she’s also been introduced to Olivia, Paige, Gemma, Heidi, Lauren and Jessie.

‘I thought exactly the same when I first came here.’

‘You volunteered at Elsie’s bakery too?’

‘Yes, before I got the job there. Everyone here did.’

She looked around. ‘Really? Why did everyone decide to stay?’

‘I don’t know. Different reasons, I guess. Personally, I fell in love with the bay, the people, being close to the sea. Plus, I realised my then-ex, Jude, lived here.’ She shrugged. ‘We got back together whilst I was volunteering and the rest, as they say, is history.’

‘I can certainly see the charm of the bay.’ Evie nodded. ‘The way Elsie and everyone at the bakery are so welcoming, too. I’ve never experienced

that before.'

'Yes, they're a good bunch. All of them. And Elsie is just amazing, one of the kindest people I've ever known.'

'Same here.' It was true. Elsie seemed to have time for everyone. Even when she'd turned up late after her lunch break earlier, she had only praised her for helping rescue the sheep. She hadn't been disappointed she'd been late or made her feel as though she'd let anyone down. In fact, she'd insisted she'd taken a bit of time to clean herself up and get something to eat before serving again. Elsie herself had stood in for her so that Diane and Brooke hadn't missed their breaks.

'Come on you two, you might as well put your two pence worth in as well.' Linking arms with Evie and Molly, Elsie walked them towards a row of wedding gowns. 'What do you think?'

Evie pulled out a large, puffy ivory gown and grimaced.

'Not that one, hey?' Chuckling, Elsie shook her head. 'I don't think it's for me either.'

'Which one do you like?' Evie ran her fingers across the row of dresses.

'Oh, now you're asking. Nothing too puffy or too embellished, that's for sure. Apart from that, I don't really have a clue.'

'Have you thought about the colour?' Molly pulled the skirt of an ivory gown and held it next to a white one.

'That's one thing I have thought about. I think ivory. I'm worried the white will wash me out.' She tapped her cheeks. 'Especially with my hair, too.'

'Ivory will be nice. It'll warm your features.' A woman in high heels, wearing a black dress suit, held out her hand. 'You must be our bride, Elsie? I'm Savannah and I'll be your stylist today.'

'Hello, Savannah, lovely to meet you. I'm sorry for filling up the shop with my entourage.' Elsie blushed.

'That's absolutely not a problem. I think I spoke to Diane on the phone? She did warn us how many of you they'd be.' She giggled. 'It's lovely to see so many people here to support and help you choose your perfect dress.'

'Well, yes, it is. I'm very lucky.' Elsie beamed.

'Have you had enough time to browse our collection? Has anything caught your eye?'

'Not really.' Elsie frowned. 'Not because I haven't seen anything I like. It's the opposite, really. There're so many beautiful dresses I'm not really

sure where to begin or what would suit me.'

'That's where I come in. I suggest we try on a few different silhouettes first? Once we find the shape which suits you best and you feel the most comfortable in, we can go from there. How does that sound?'

'That sounds perfect. Thank you.'

'I've found this one. Look, isn't it just perfect?' Diane wafted a gown in front of her.

Touching the ivory lace, Elsie smiled. 'I actually rather like that.'

'You sound surprised. Didn't you think I'd suggest something so nice?' Diane placed her free hand on her hip.

'I must admit, out of everyone it was you I was worried about. I thought you'd try to get me to squeeze into an overpriced and over-embellished huge princess gown or something.' Elsie chuckled.

'I can't believe you have no faith in me.' Shaking her head, Diane pouted.

'The first one you chose for her was exactly that, a huge, puffy princess gown.' Joining them, Wendy laughed.

'Well, yes, but this one's nice, isn't it?'

'Yes, it's lovely, thank you. I'll try it on.' Taking the gown, Elsie rubbed her forearm.

'Good.' Diane turned around. 'Shall we sit there?' She pointed to a large curved white sofa sitting in the middle of the shop floor.

'Yes, please. If you all take a seat, I'll borrow Elsie for a few minutes, and we'll be out to show you all soon.' Walking along the row of gowns, Savannah pulled a few from the rail, draping them across her arm before leading Elsie through some heavy burgundy curtains at the back of the shop.

'I can't wait to see Elsie in a wedding dress. It's getting so close!' Nina led the way towards the sofa.

'I know. I can't believe Elsie's not worrying, though. There's not long to plan everything.' Diane sat down next to Nina.

'She has told Savannah when the wedding is, hasn't she?' Lauren bit the bottom of her lip.

'I told her when I booked the appointment, she said Elsie would have to buy something off the hanger as she wouldn't have time to order anything in.' Diane pulled a fluffy cushion from behind her back, looked at it, and threw it over the back.

'That's good then. I'd hate Elsie to fall in love with something and then be told there wasn't time to order it in.' Brooke crossed her legs.

‘How did the suit fittings go yesterday?’ Evie pulled her ring off and pushed it back on her finger.

‘Great. Ian chose a dark grey suit with tails and the ushers and best men will be wearing lighter grey.’ Brooke grinned.

‘And Rueben and Toby looked so smart. And little Hudson, he looked so grown up.’ Nina smiled.

‘Hudson’s so excited to walk down the aisle. He keeps calling it his wedding and when he gets married. I don’t think he really understands what’s going on.’ Wendy laughed.

Savanah stepped out from behind the curtains and clapped her hands. ‘Here comes your beautiful bride.’

Silence enveloped the boutique as Elsie stepped out from behind the curtains. The room was soon filled with a series of gushes as she stepped onto the small pedestal in front of the long sofa and let the gown fall around her ankles.

‘Elsie, that’s beautiful on you.’ Diane held her hands over her mouth.

‘Yes, it’s gorgeous.’ Jessie wiped tears from her eyes.

‘It has a beautiful train too.’ Savanah helped Elsie turn around and swished out the train for her, the intricate lace spreading across the floor behind her.

‘It really is lovely. What do you think, Elsie?’ Teresa leaned forward.

Turning back to face them, Elsie pulled the neckline of the dress up a little. ‘I really like it. It is beautiful. I’m not too sure about this neckline, though. I feel it’s a little low, and I’d quite like something with a little capped sleeve or something.’

‘I’ll think you’ll all agree it’s a fabulous starting point.’ Savanah held out her hand to help Elsie down. ‘And now we try on another. I have just the one in mind for you.’

‘Ooh, I wonder what she’ll come out in next.’ Diane grinned.

‘I have no idea. All I know is I can’t wait.’ Lauren leaned back against the sofa cushions.

‘Here she comes now!’ Diane clasped her hands as Elsie stepped out wearing a pale ivory satin gown with capped sleeves.

Stepping onto the pedestal, Elsie grimaced. ‘It’s too much, isn’t it? All the crystals?’ She ran her hands across the embellished bodice. ‘And the satin? It’s not me, is it?’

‘Umm, it’s nice but I can tell you don’t feel comfortable in it so that tells me it’s not your dress.’ Teresa shook her head.

‘Thanks, love. You’re right, I don’t feel at all comfortable.’ Shielding her mouth, she stage-whispered. ‘It feels a bit tight, too.’

‘Go on, take it off and get the next one on.’ Diane waved her hand.

Looking across at Savannah, Elsie nodded.

‘Onto the next one.’ Savannah looked across at Elsie’s entourage. ‘We liked the lace of the previous gown, didn’t we?’

‘Yes.’

‘Definitely.’

‘The lace really suited you, Elsie.’

‘Then I may have just the one. Let me check I can sell it to you off the hanger before I get it though.’ Savannah took Elsie’s hand, leading her back behind the curtain.

‘Oh, I really hope she gets that feeling.’ Brooke sighed.

‘What feeling?’ Diane frowned as she retied the laces on her trainers.

‘You know, the one everyone gets on those wedding dress shows. The feeling that they’ve found their perfect dress.’ Brooke smiled.

‘Is that a real thing, though?’ Diane leaned forward. ‘Daisy, did you know your wedding dress was the one you were meant to get when you tried it on?’

‘Yes, definitely.’ Daisy grinned. ‘I can’t explain it, but when you know, you know.’

‘Fingers crossed for this one, then.’ Diane crossed her fingers.

‘Here she comes.’ As soon as Jessie spoke, everyone looked towards the curtains as Elsie stepped out.

‘It’s beautiful.’ Watching Elsie walking towards the pedestal, Evie smiled. The lace on this dress looked softer, more delicate than the first, and the bodice was made of a light fabric which almost hung in swathes across her.

‘Oh, wow.’

‘Elsie…’

‘Shall we ask our bride how she feels in this one?’ Savannah swished the short train up in the air, watching as it slowly settled to the floor.

‘I feel like a bride.’ Elsie wiped her eyes. ‘I absolutely love it.’

‘Here you go.’ Teresa ran forward and handed a tissue to her.

‘Thank you, love.’ Dabbing her eyes, Elsie looked down the line of her entourage. ‘What do you all think?’

‘It’s stunning. It really is. That fabric is amazing. So delicate.’ Molly wiped at her own eyes.

‘It really is. And the lace!’

‘It’s your dress, isn’t it, Elsie?’ Freya leaned forward.

‘Yes, I think it is. Actually no, I *know* it is. It’s my dress! It’s what I want to wear when I marry Ian.’ Elsie dabbed her eyes again.

‘Perfect. Would you like to try on a veil? And maybe a little tiara?’ Savannah walked towards a glass cabinet at the back of the boutique.

‘Oh, I’m not too sure about a veil.’ Elsie closed her eyes as Savannah tucked a veil into her hair and then added a tiara.

‘Take a look and see what you think?’

Looking in the mirror, Elsie fanned out the veil behind her head and grinned. ‘I never thought I’d want a veil, but I think I actually do.’

‘Yes, it’s perfect. Just like that. The tiara is gorgeous too.’ Standing up, Heidi rushed across and hugged her. ‘You look beautiful. I mean, you always look beautiful, but this is just so perfect for your wedding day.’

‘Oh, love. Thank you. You’re going to start me off again.’ Chuckling, Elsie held her arms out as one by one everyone hugged her.

Chapter Fourteen



‘Look at this one!’ Diane pulled out a dress which was at least as wide as she was tall. ‘How would you even get through the church doors, let alone get close enough to your new husband to have the first dance?’

‘I don’t know. This one’s nice.’ Evie smoothed down a pale pink dress. She looked around the boutique. Everyone apart from her, Elsie, Diane, Wendy, Teresa and Molly had already left.

‘Ooh pink. I think that would suit you.’ Diane grinned. ‘I can imagine you wearing something a little different.’

Evie raised her eyebrows. She’d never imagined that she’d even get married, let alone thought about what style or colour wedding dress she might wear.

‘Right, that’s it. All done.’ Turning away from the till, Elsie patted the dress bag draped over her arm.

‘Ladies, if you’re interested, I have a photographer arriving in a moment to take some photographs of our new collection. You’d be doing me a huge favour if you stay and model for an hour or so? I have some more ladies coming too, but the more the merrier.’ Savannah called across from the counter.

‘Us? Really? Modelling?’ Diane flicked her hair over her shoulders and laughed. ‘I’m up for it if you guys are?’

‘I’m up for it.’ Molly grinned.

‘Not me. I’ve got to get back to Gavin and the kids.’ Teresa fished her car keys out of her handbag.

‘And you won’t catch me doing any modelling, even if it does mean I miss out on trying on those lovely dresses.’ Wendy shook her head.

‘Oh, go on.’ Diane tilted her head.

‘Nope, not a chance.’ Wendy linked arms with Elsie. ‘We’ve got a hot chocolate calling our names.’

‘I’m afraid it’s not my thing, either.’ Evie scrunched up her nose. She’d been surrounded by all things wedding for hours now, the last thing she needed was to try any of those gowns on.

‘Really?’ Diane ran her fingers across the skirt of the pink gown. ‘Not even so you could try this one on?’

‘Absolutely no chance.’ Evie glanced across at Elsie, Wendy and Teresa. If Jack was going to be the photographer, then she definitely didn’t want to do it, she couldn’t think of anything more embarrassing. And it had to be the job Jack had mentioned. How many wedding dress boutiques were in Trestow, anyway? Even if there was more than one, she was certain they wouldn’t all be photographing new stock on the same day.

‘That’s a shame.’

Spinning around, Evie sighed. Too late. ‘Hi, Jack.’

‘Are you taking the photos, love?’ Elsie put her hand on Jack’s forearm.

‘Yes, I am.’ Grinning, he nodded towards the dress bag she was holding. ‘I see you’ve found your dress?’

‘Yes, I have, love. Thank you for asking.’ Grinning, Elsie patted the dress bag before looking at Wendy and Teresa. ‘Right, come on, you two. Let’s get a wriggle on.’

‘I’ll come too, if that’s okay?’ Evie stepped forward.

‘Aw, stay. It’ll be a laugh, especially with Jack taking the pics.’ Diane clasped her hands in front of her. ‘Please? You don’t even have to try anything on, just stay for the laughs.’

‘No, I really can’t.’

‘Can’t or won’t?’ Jack chuckled. ‘No pressure, but Diane’s right, we normally have a fun time on these types of shoots.’

Evie looked from Diane to Jack and back again. ‘Okay, I’ll stay, but I’m not putting any of those things on.’ She waved her hand at the dresses.

‘Awesome!’

‘I’ll see you tomorrow then, Diane and Molly.’ Elsie hugged them. ‘And you later, love.’ Elsie hugged Evie’s shoulders before heading outside with Wendy and Teresa.

‘Right ladies. This way, please. The gowns you’ll be modelling are out the back.’ Savannah walked towards the back of the shop.

‘Didn’t she say other people were coming to model them, too?’ Molly whispered as they followed Savannah through a door behind the till.

‘I thought so.’ Diane shrugged.

‘Right, ladies. Take a seat and I’ll bring the dresses through.’ Savannah looked towards the door they’d just walked through. ‘Sorry, one moment. I think our other ladies have arrived.’

‘Thank goodness for that. For a moment I thought it’d just be the three of us.’ Molly sat on a chair.

‘You mean two? I’m not modelling, remember.’ Evie joined her and crossed her legs.

‘Sorry, yes, two.’

‘Hi, are you modelling too?’ Three women walked through the door. ‘I’m Pat and here are Yvette and Liza.’

‘Hi, nice to meet you. Yes, we are.’ Diane glanced quickly at Evie. ‘Two of us.’

‘Have you done this before?’ Yvette sat down next to Molly.

‘Nope. Have you?’

‘No.’ Yvette laughed. ‘I’m sure we’ll muddle through, though.’

‘Hopefully.’ Diane grimaced.

‘Here we are, ladies.’ Savannah pulled a rail packed full of gowns into the room. ‘Come and take a look. We’ll get you all dressed and then Jack will take some individual shots before some group photos. How does that sound?’

‘Sounds good. Do we get to choose what dresses we wear?’ Diane stood up.

‘Certainly. There is a broad selection in terms of style and shape, so hopefully, they’ll be something you all like.’ She glanced back at the dresses. ‘I think you’ll all get to wear two if that’s okay?’

‘Great.’ Pat and Liza approached the dresses and began searching through them.

‘Come on, let’s go and choose.’ Diane pulled Molly to standing and rushed towards the rail.

‘Oh, Jack. Thank you.’ Savannah looked towards the door as Jack came through, carrying two large bags. ‘If you could set up over there, please? That way, we’ll have the nice wallpaper as a background for the individual shots.’

‘Good plan.’ Jack swung the bags from his shoulder and put together a tripod before clipping his camera on top. ‘Evie, can you just give me a hand quickly, please?’

‘Of course.’ Standing up, she walked over to him. ‘What do you want me to do?’

‘Can you just help me set these up, please? I just want to make sure I get the right level of lighting.’ He passed her a lightbox and looked through the camera lens as she placed it to the side. ‘A little further back. Perfect. Thank you.’

‘Did you go back to the sanctuary?’

‘I did.’ Placing the empty bags in the corner, he nodded. ‘The sheep we rescued are all fine now. Freya and Chris cleaned their wounds and one of them needed their leg set, but they should all make a good recovery.’

‘That’s a relief.’

‘Yes. Even after all they’ve been through, they’re the lucky ones and by the way they were happily settling in, they know it too.’

She nodded.

‘And you, Evie, is it? Your hair will be the perfect match with this gown.’ Walking briskly across to her, Savannah flounced a dress around, fluffing it out.

‘Oh, sorry, I’m not modelling anything. I’m just waiting with my friends.’ Evie shoved her hands in her pockets. The dress was beautiful, but as a pale champagne-coloured satin princess gown, it would be the last thing she’d ever choose to wear even if she did believe in marriage. Which she didn’t. Not for herself, anyway.

‘But look, all the other gowns have gone. Each of the other ladies will be modelling two and now there is just this one left. My pride and joy.’ Savannah ran her hand over the crystals covering the bodice. ‘See how the light catches the crystals? This one will be a joy to photograph. Isn’t that right, Jack?’

Clearing his throat, Jack nodded. ‘Certainly. A joy.’

Evie glanced at Jack and narrowed her eyes, warning him. ‘I really can’t. I’ve not even brushed my hair today.’ Running her fingers through her hair, she picked out a strand of straw, holding it up as proof.

‘Please don’t worry. We have a hair and make-up team for the shoot.’ Walking towards her, Savannah draped her arm over Evie’s shoulders and began leading her in the direction everyone else had gone.

Twisting her neck, Evie looked over at Jack and mouthed – *help me*.

With his lips twitching, Jack held his hand up and wriggled his fingers.

As she walked into the next room, Evie twisted her ring around her finger. This was daft. She didn’t want to dress up in the gown. She didn’t want to model. Taking a deep breath, she turned to Savannah, ready to tell her.

‘Look, Evie here is saving the shoot. She’s going to be modelling this beautiful dress, my own design.’ Savannah beamed.

Closing her mouth, Evie sighed. She supposed she’d only have to wear it for a few minutes. Half an hour at the most.

Chapter Fifteen



Tugging the bodice into position, Savannah stood back. ‘Perfect. Perfect. Perfect. Perfect. You are a picture of perfection.’

Evie looked down at the dress. She certainly didn’t feel the picture of perfection. She glanced in the mirror and looked away quickly, wishing she hadn’t. The sparkly pink eyeshadow was caked on, and her hair felt as though it would fall out of its precarious bun with the slightest of movements. As for the dress itself? Yes, she supposed it might be somebody’s dream dress, but most definitely not hers. For someone who usually lived in dark suits when at work and scruffy loungewear in the short evenings, this was the furthest away from her style as possible.

‘Oh wow, look at you, Evie. That dress is huge.’ Diane gasped as she walked back from her photoshoot.

‘It is, isn’t it?’ It was heavy too. She could almost feel bruises forming as her hips supported the fabric of the skirt.

‘Right, your turn, Evie. Let’s go.’ Picking up the long veil which had been stuck into Evie’s tightly wound bun, Savannah pushed the door open.

Evie paused. She couldn’t do this. She couldn’t go out there like this. Not with Jack there. What would he think of her? All dolled up in a humongous wedding gown?

‘Come on.’ Savannah nodded towards Jack, who was fiddling around with his camera at the far end of the other room.

Swallowing, she rolled her eyes. What did she care what he thought of her? Lifting her head up, she walked through the door.

‘Here we go, one last bride for you, Jack, before the group shots.’

Turning, Jack opened and closed his mouth.

‘Savannah?’

Turning, Savannah looked back the way they had come and fanned Evie’s veil across her back. ‘I’m sorry, I’ll be as quick as I can.’

Evie watched as she hurried out, the door swinging shut behind her. She strode towards Jack. ‘Don’t say a word.’

‘Well, I... I was only going to say you look great.’

Narrowing her eyes, she stood in front of the camera. 'If you mean that, I don't think we can be friends anymore.'

Chuckling, Jack ran his fingers through his hair. 'It's not that bad.'

'Which bit? The crazy eyeshadow, the huge, puffy skirt, the over-embellished bodice or the bun which is so tightly pulled it almost feels as though my eyeballs are about to fall out?'

'Ha-ha, now that would be a first, capturing the moment a bride's eyes roll out of their sockets.'

'Very funny. Now, just get on with it.' She crossed her arms.

'I... umm... may I make a small suggestion?'

'What?'

'Could you pose?'

'Pose?' What did he think she was?

'Arms by your sides would be a start. Right, that's it.' He looked through his camera lens again. 'And maybe a smile, too.'

She grimaced. She really shouldn't have let herself be talked into this.

'May I?' Jack walked towards her and held out his hands.

Looking down at his hands, she frowned and placed her hands in his. His skin was warm, his grasp strong but gentle.

'Take a deep breath in.' Jack closed his eyes and breathed in, holding it before slowly letting out his breath and gently shaking Evie's hands.

Evie swallowed, trying to hold her laughter in until she snorted. 'Sorry, it's just...'

Opening his eyes, he searched her face. 'It's just what?'

'Well, this.' Still holding his hands, she shrugged her shoulders. 'I'm standing here in this stupid dress, with you trying to take photos of me. Who'd have thought?'

Laughing, Jack shook his head. 'I guess it is quite funny.'

'Quite funny? It's hilarious. It's just... nonsense. Ridiculous. I'm wearing a wedding dress and a hideous one at that.'

'Shh, don't let Savannah hear you say that.'

'No, I won't. After all, this is her pride and joy.' Rolling her shoulders back, she relaxed. So, she was in a wedding dress. It didn't mean anything. It didn't mean she was suddenly going to want to get married or anything. It didn't change her stance on marriage. Not one iota.

Keeping his eyes on hers, Jack leaned forward, his breath warm on her cheeks.

Blinking, Evie snatched her hands back and stepped away.

‘Sorry, I...’

‘No, I’m sorry. I just...’ Every fibre of her being was screaming at her to let him kiss her, to kiss him back, but she couldn’t. If she did, she was opening herself up to more. She was lowering her walls. She was rewriting her very mindset about relationships. She couldn’t. She wouldn’t.

‘I’m really sorry. I...’ Jack rubbed his hand across the back of his neck.

But this was Jack. The man standing in front of her. The man who had rescued an injured crow and helped to rescue the sheep, all within less than a twenty-four-hour period. This was the man who listened to her, made her laugh, respected her opinion. The man who made her skin tingle and her heart beat faster whenever she saw him. She pinched the bridge of her nose. What was she even thinking?

Shifting on his feet, he walked back to his camera and looked at her. ‘Can we just pretend it didn’t happen?’

‘No, I don’t think we can.’ Flinging her veil over her shoulder, she strode towards him and took his hands in hers. Before she could stop herself, she leaned forward and kissed him.

‘You want this?’ Pulling away, Jack looked into her eyes.

‘Yes.’ And she did. She didn’t know why or what it might mean to her, but at that moment in time, yes, she wanted to kiss him. She wanted to be with him. In that moment, she wanted to feel his lips against hers, she wanted to feel his arms holding her, his heart beating against hers.

Cupping her chin in his hand, he leaned in closer again, his lips brushing hers.

The door swung open again, and Evie jumped back. Rushing around in front of the camera again, she grinned as Jack took photo after photo.

‘Fantastic. You’re a natural, Evie. And now for the group photos.’ Savannah turned and called behind her. ‘Group photos, everyone. Come and join us, please.’

Chapter Sixteen



The car journey back to the bay had been quiet, silent almost, the both of them lost in their own thoughts. Diane and Molly had stayed in Trestow to meet their partners, Harry and Jude, for a drink and Evie had accepted Jack's offer of a ride back.

Pulling up in front of the bakery, Jack pulled the handbrake up and nodded towards the beachfront. 'Did you still fancy that stroll along the beach?'

Evie peered out of the window. The beach was empty, the light from the moon illuminating the gentle waves rolling across the sand. 'Yes, I'd like that.' Stepping out into the cold night air, Evie waited for him to lock the car before they both made their way down the concrete slope to the beach.

'It's beautiful tonight, isn't it?' Jack looked up at the full moon.

'It is.' Her trainers sank into the wet sand as she stepped off the slope. Looking across towards the ocean, she closed her eyes, listening to the rhythmic ebb and flow of the water. She'd missed this. She'd missed the way it made her feel, the cleansing of the sea breeze against her skin, the sinking of her trainers into the sand each time she moved. They walked down towards the ocean's edge, their footprints a map on the beach behind them.

'That was fun in the end.'

'Yes, it was.' Evie smiled as she thought about the group photos. Diane had been right; it had been a laugh. And an experience, one she probably wouldn't ever do again. 'It still feels as though I'm carrying around that heavy skirt, though. I'm sure I'm going to have bruises all over my hips tomorrow.'

'Ouch. It looked heavy.' Pausing, he looked at her.

Yanking the hairband holding her bun in place, she shook her hair out. 'Wow, that feels so much better.'

Nodding, Jack began walking again.

Pulling the hairband over her wrist, Evie looked across at him and frowned. 'What happened back at the photo shoot, the way we kissed, and now. What's going on?'

Jack stopped and looked at her. 'I wasn't sure. I know you said you don't date, and you certainly don't believe in love. I know we kissed, but maybe we shouldn't have.'

'Oh.' Swallowing, Evie looked down at the sand, digging a line in the wet grains with the toe of her trainers. 'If that's what you want.'

'It's not. It's not what I want. I just assumed... because you said you didn't date.' Looking down, he shoved his hands in his pockets. 'I...'

'I'd like to try dating. If you would?' She looked at him, surprised at the very words she'd spoken and met his eyes.

'You would?'

Nodding, she smiled. 'I can't promise I won't muck it up and of course, if we're still together, I mean that is if you want to be, but if you do and we're still together when I go back to London, I know we'll have to make a decision then, but...' She shrugged. 'I guess I'm beginning to realise that maybe being in a relationship isn't the worst thing in the world.'

'The worst thing in the world?'

'Yes, no. I guess I'm trying to say that after spending time with Elsie and Ian, and even Chris and Freya, maybe I'm beginning to think some people might just be able to make it work.' She shrugged. She wasn't even sure if it all made sense to her. She couldn't imagine what Jack was feeling. She closed her eyes. Well, it had been worth a go. She'd tried opening her heart up a little. At least she'd tried. She felt his hand cupping the back of her neck, felt him drawing her closer, his lips against hers.

'I believe.' Pulling away, Jack grinned.

'I'd like to try.'

'Then we'll try.' Holding out his hand, he grasped hers, interlocking his fingers with hers.



'EVERYTHING OKAY, LOVE? Wendy has just gone home. Did you want to come and sit down while I finish my hot chocolate? I can get you one too?' Elsie indicated the chair opposite her at the table closest to the coffee and cake counter as Evie clicked the bakery door locked.

'It's okay, I'll make one. Thanks.' Switching the machine on, she waited as it buzzed and whirred as it warmed up.

'How was the photo shoot? Did you model anything in the end?'

‘It was really fun, actually. And, yes, I got coerced into wearing this huge monstrosity.’ Evie laughed as she placed her hot chocolate on the table and shrugged off her coat.

‘Was it really that bad? The dress?’ Elsie grimaced.

‘Yes, it was. And I think I’m bruised by the weight of it.’ She laughed.

‘I think I’ve got some arnica which will help with the bruising. I’ll have a look when I go upstairs.’

‘Okay, thanks.’ Evie hugged her mug in her hands.

‘Is everything okay, love?’ Elsie touched her forearm.

Looking across at her, Evie nodded before shaking her head. ‘I’m not really sure. I’ve always been so sure of what I believe, the way I live my life, but since coming here and meeting this guy, I just... I’m beginning to question what I always thought of as true.’

‘Has this got something to do with Jack?’

‘Yes. My parents divorced when I was young.’ She looked into her mug, watching the bubbles on the surface of the hot chocolate collide with each other. ‘It was a messy breakup. It led me into my career, family law, and I’ve always believed relationships to be a waste of time and energy.’ She shrugged. ‘You know, you give your all to someone and then, sooner or later, they break things off. It’s over and you can never recoup that time or energy you spent on them in good faith.’

‘And now?’

‘That’s the problem. I’m starting to question that. I see you and Ian, and you seem happy. You’re about to get married and yet you’ve known each other for years. And Jack, well, I feel something for him. And I know how stupid that sounds. I hardly know this guy, but he’s making me question myself. Making me feel as though, yes, maybe I would like a relationship with him.’

‘Why does that worry you?’

‘If I do date him, which is what I think we’re doing now, dating, then I’ve led my whole life avoiding this very situation.’ Evie tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear. ‘What does that say about me and my past? Have I just wasted all these years believing that I didn’t want to be in a relationship?’

Sighing, Elsie leaned back in her chair. ‘There’s another way of looking at this situation, you know.’

‘What’s that?’ Evie frowned. How else could she look at it? Feel about it?

‘That it’s Jack that’s made you change your mind. That it’s Jack who you’ve been waiting for.’

‘So, you think I wouldn’t have felt like this about someone else if I’d given them a chance?’ she shifted in her chair.

‘You didn’t, did you? Or you would have changed your views already.’

Evie nodded slowly. ‘That’s true. So, you don’t think I’ve wasted my time by not dating?’

‘I think you’re right where you need to be.’

‘But what if I’ve got it wrong this time? What if I shouldn’t date Jack? What if I was right before about not wanting to date? What then?’

Elsie leaned forward and covered Evie’s hand with hers. ‘Then you’ve opened up your heart and you’ve given it a go.’

‘Yes. I guess you’re right.’

Chapter Seventeen



‘Enjoy yourselves.’ Elsie held the door open as Evie and Jack slipped outside.

‘What animal are we rescuing tonight, then?’ Evie buttoned up her coat. Chuckling, Jack paused and wrapped his arms around her. ‘None, hopefully. Hopefully, there aren’t any animals or birds or fish to be rescued.’ ‘Or insects.’

‘Or insects. I wondered if you wanted to go into Trestow? The mop fair is in town?’

‘Is it? Have they got any decent rides?’

‘What do you mean by decent?’ Jack frowned. ‘They’ve got a carousel, a helter-skelter. They’re my idea of decent rides. A Ferris wheel at a push.’

‘How about Booster or Evolution or the Double-shot?’

‘Is that the one where you sit in chairs and get launched into space?’ He grimaced.

‘Ha-ha, not quite. I think the mop fair sounds fun.’ Evie sat in the passenger seat of the car.

‘Umm, can I change my mind?’ Chuckling, he started the engine.



HOLDING JACK’S HAND as they made their way through the throngs of people, Evie grinned as Jack side-stepped and looped his arm around her to avoid her colliding with anyone. He really was kind and thoughtful. As they walked past the different rides, a million different songs battled to be heard above the loud hubbub of people chatting and laughing. Screams of excitement and shouts of ‘go faster’ floated into the crowds from the brave riders and cheers from children and adults alike winning huge teddies and bubble wands from the numerous game and raffle stalls lining the streets competed to be heard.

‘You don’t ever forget the smell of the fair, do you?’ Leaning close, Jack’s lips were close to her ear, his voice barely audible above all the noise.

‘The smell of hot dogs mixed with candy floss?’ Evie grinned. She hadn’t been to the fair for years, but as soon as they’d stepped out of the car and made their way towards the music and the lights, it had been as though she’d stepped back in time. ‘Oh, look, there’s the Double-shot. Shall we have a go?’

Jack looked up at the ride towering above them and shuddered.

‘We can warm up with the carousel or the hall of mirrors, if you’d prefer?’ Leaning close to him. She laughed.

‘Nope, if I can hunt injured crows and wrestle sheep to safety, I’m sure the Double-shot will be a breeze.’

‘Exactly.’ Evie led the way through the crowds of people towards the queue for the ride. Glancing across at him, she frowned. ‘Are you sure you want to go on here? We can stick to the calmer rides if you like?’

‘No, it’s fine. This looks... uh... fun.’

‘Honestly, I don’t mind giving it a miss. I’ve not been to the fair, let alone on a ride like this in years, so I probably don’t remember it properly, anyway.’

‘Two?’ The woman sitting in the small booth by the entrance to the ride held up two fingers.

‘Yes, please.’ Jack slid the money beneath the glass, took Evie’s hand and stepped up to the ride.

Evie followed Jack as they were shown to their seats. With their safety bar pulled down in front of them, Evie looked at Jack’s knuckles, glowing white in the flashing lights. Leaning across to him, she shouted to be heard over the beat of the music. ‘It’s not too late to get off.’

‘Nope. It’ll be fun.’ Frowning, he wobbled the safety bar, checking it was secure.

‘Okay.’ Leaning back in the seat, Evie grinned. She loved everything about the fair, the thrill of the rides, the atmosphere. It reminded her of her teenage years, freedom and testing her limits.

A high-pitched whirring blared through the speakers, signalling the start of the ride, and Jack interlocked his fingers with Evie’s, gripping tighter.

Within seconds of the signal, the music was back on, and the ride lurched upward, their feet flying off the ground. Higher and higher they went before jerking to a stop, the town at their feet. Leaning forward, Evie grinned. The crowds of people were little pinpricks in the lights from the ride beneath them.

‘Careful!’ Jack gripped her hand tighter, pulling her back with his other one before quickly holding onto the safety bar again.

Looking across at him, her heart lurched. The colour had drained from his face. ‘It’s okay. It will be over soon.’ As soon as she’d spoken, the ride awoke, and they plummeted to the ground.

When it looked as though the ride wouldn’t stop in time, that they would break the surface, they were tugged upwards again, faster this time. Up towards the sky and the stars, which had been lost in the glow from the fairground.

Time and time again they were thrown skywards, only to be dragged back down to earth. Evie couldn’t help but laugh, the adrenaline pumping through her body increasing with every turn. She looked across at Jack, who caught her eye and began laughing, too. Soon they were both roaring with laughter, still gripping onto each other and to the safety bar holding them in.

As the ride slowed to a stop, Evie took a deep breath. Their safety bar was unlocked, and she stood up, holding her hand out for Jack.

‘Is it really over?’

‘Yes, it’s over, but if you stay sitting there, you’ll end up going on it again.’ Shaking her head, she laughed as he jumped to standing. As they walked back towards the main pathway between the rides, Jack paused, bending over. ‘Are you okay?’

‘Yes, I will be. I just can’t believe I actually went on that.’ Straightening his back, he laughed.

‘We’ll stick to the calmer rides now.’ She slipped her arm through his elbow.

‘No chance, I’ve got a taste for the thrill of the fair now!’ Grinning, he pointed ahead. ‘How about that one? Is it Evolution?’

‘Yes, it is. Are you sure, though?’

‘Absolutely. Bring it on.’ Leaning across to her, he kissed her.



‘THAT WAS SUCH A GOOD night. If I hadn’t been trying not to look a wimp to you, I’d have never gone on that first ride and never gone on the other ones.’ Tearing a piece of candy floss from the bag on the table between them, Jack popped it into his mouth.

‘It was great fun. Thanks for suggesting it.’ Evie grinned and sipped her coffee. She looked around the empty bakery, silent apart from the two of

them talking.

‘Seriously though, I really would never have gone on a ride like that, not in a million years.’

‘Maybe that’s what we’re about, encouraging each other to try new things.’

‘Oh yes, the rescuing of Axl and the sheep.’ Jack took another cloud of candy floss.

‘Yes, but I was thinking about the relationship.’ Feeling a fierce heat spreading across her face, she looked down into her mug. ‘I haven’t dated in years. Not properly, not since uni.’

‘That’s not such a bad thing.’ He shrugged.

‘Isn’t it?’ She frowned.

‘No, it means that you’re not jaded by the dating world, and I can prove to you how awesome being in a relationship can be.’

She laughed. ‘I was jaded by the dating world before I’d even entered it.’

Wrapping his hands around hers, they both held her mug. ‘No, you were jaded by your parents’ relationship experience. And later on, by your clients’. Not by yours.’

Frowning, she looked up at him. ‘You might just be right. I hadn’t thought of it like that.’

‘Glad I can be of use.’ He grinned.

‘How about you? What’s your dating life been like up until now?’

Looking down at the table, he blew a strand of hair from his eyes before looking back at her. ‘Do you really want to know?’

‘Of course I do.’

‘Honestly, it’s not been great. I moved in with my childhood sweetheart when I was seventeen. We went to the same uni, studied different courses but spent all our spare time together. Anyway, we both moved to the city, and she got a high-powered job in marketing. I got a job in the social services, and we stopped having the time for each other, both stayed late at work.’

‘Oh.’

‘And then I caught her cheating with one of her colleagues.’

‘Oh no, I’m so sorry.’

‘There’s no need to be. It was inevitable that we’d break up sooner or later. Our lives had all become too different. I was busting my guts in a job where we were understaffed and overstretched, whereas she was working her way to the top. She earned the money so we could keep renting in the city, go

on the nice holidays. We'd forgotten who we were. I'd forgotten who I was. She moved in with him, and I tried my best to stay afloat on my own. Shortly after that, my dad got ill, and I made the decision to move back.'

'That must have been a difficult time.'

'It was, but it needed to happen. I dread to think how my life would have turned out if I hadn't found her cheating.' He shrugged.

'And you've dated since then?'

'No, but not because I don't believe in love, simply because I've not found anyone to take a chance on until now.' He grinned.

Smiling, she laced her fingers with his. 'Well, thank you for taking a chance on me.'

'Thank you, too.' Standing up, he leaned across the table and their lips touched.

Chapter Eighteen



‘Oh, and these two please, love?’ Elsie held out two plates of homemade pizza slices.

Taking the plates, Evie pushed the door open into the bakery and placed the plates down on the tables Diane and Brooke had pushed together.

‘I’ll grab the mood board and the magazines.’ Molly disappeared into the wedding planning office, returning with a large sheet of card and a mound of wedding magazines.

Sitting down, Evie looked up and down the table. Everyone was here. Everyone who had been at the wedding boutique when Elsie had chosen her wedding dress. Gemma, Paige, Heidi and Lauren were sitting down at one end of the table, with Daisy, Freya, Olivia, Teresa, and Jessie at the other. In the middle sat Wendy, Brooke, Nina, Molly, Carrie, and Diane while the chair in the centre of the table had been saved for Elsie.

Diane swivelled around in her chair, watching the kitchen door. ‘Do you think she’s stalling because she doesn’t want to plan with us?’

‘She’ll be here in a moment.’ Wendy pushed the mood board into the centre of the table. ‘Evie, have you got that list you and Elsie made of things that still needed to be planned?’

‘Yes, here it is.’ Flicking through the pages in the notebook, Evie left it open and positioned it next to the mood board.

‘Great, I think we’re ready.’ Wendy grinned.

‘We’re ready? Does that mean I don’t have to come and plan?’ Elsie placed a bowl of carrot and cucumber sticks on the table.

‘No, it means we’re ready to plan.’ Shaking her head, Wendy laughed.

‘Ah, of course.’ Sitting in the seat, Elsie pulled the notebook towards her. ‘Let’s get this show on the road then.’

‘Yes, let’s. What’s first on the agenda?’ Diane asked.

‘Let me see.’ Elsie ran her finger down the list. ‘Shall we start with the flowers because I feel that decision will lead to the others?’

‘Good idea. Have you had any thoughts?’ Wendy picked up a pen, ready to write on the mood board.

‘I have.’ Elsie nodded. ‘It’s been a tricky decision and at first, I did think about having sunflowers. You know how much I love them. They always make me smile just because of how bright and cheerful looking they are, but then I began thinking it would be quite nice to have something with a bit of a family connection.’

‘Ooh, what have you chosen?’ Gemma leaned forward in her chair.

‘I’ve chosen peonies, pink peonies. They represent happiness, love and romance, plus they were my gran’s favourite flower.’

‘Peonies are so beautiful. I think that’s a perfect choice.’ Carrie smiled.

‘Thank you.’ Elsie nodded. ‘Now, that leads me to the next decision, the bridesmaids’ dresses. I know you’re all dying to find out what colour I’d like you to wear.’

‘Oh yes. Please don’t make us wear orange.’ Gemma grimaced.

‘Or grey, it washes me out.’ Jessie frowned.

‘I don’t think I’ve ever seen grey bridesmaid dresses.’ Wendy raised her eyebrows. ‘I bet it could be quite a nice colour, though.’

‘Don’t worry, we won’t have orange or grey, I’ve already decided.’ Else grinned. ‘It was a close call. A very close call. At first, I had decided on royal blue. Blue, the colour of the ocean, but since I’ll be carrying pink peonies and after catching a glimpse of some bridesmaid dresses this colour yesterday at the boutique, I’d rather like dusky pink. What do you all think? Will you be comfortable wearing dusky pink?’ Elsie looked up and down the table.

‘I love dusky pink.’ Brooke picked up a slice of pizza.

‘Isn’t pink Pippa’s favourite colour, Teresa? She’ll love wearing a pink dress.’ Olivia grinned at Teresa.

‘Yes, it is. Ever since you and Ian announced your wedding, she’s been nagging me to persuade you to let her wear a pink dress, so she’ll be thrilled.’ Teresa laughed.

‘Yes, that was another reason I’ve decided on pink. I can’t let my little flower girl down, can I?’ Elsie chuckled. ‘I spoke to Savannah about the bridesmaid dresses last night too and she said there are a few different styles of dresses and luckily, the bridesmaid dresses don’t take as long to be made so you’ll each be able to go along to the boutique whenever you’re free and choose the style you want, and she’ll have them all made up in the same fabric.’

‘So, we can really choose whatever style we want?’ Lauren grinned.

‘Yes, you can, love. Any style they offer, she can get them made up. She did ask you to pop along sooner rather than later though, if that’s okay?’ Elsie looked at Evie. ‘That’s you too, Evie. I’d like all my girls to be my bridesmaids.’

‘Me? Really?’ Evie lowered her mug of coffee. She hadn’t been a bridesmaid before. Everyone she’d known who had got married had always been too aware of her aversion to marriage to even contemplate asking her, but this felt right. She nodded. ‘I’d love to be, thank you.’

‘Good, good. Now, is there anything else on this list of things to do?’ Elsie stirred her coffee.

‘Food. You and Ian still haven’t been into the restaurant to decide what we need to cook.’ Daisy frowned.

‘Oh, yes, love. Shall we pop in tomorrow?’

‘Yes, tomorrow would work.’ Daisy nodded, pulled out a notebook from her bag and began writing inside.

‘The wedding car. Are you going to hire a car to get to the church and back?’ Nina tapped a photograph of a car that had been stuck to the mood board.

‘Ian’s dealing with that. He wants to surprise me.’ Elsie smiled and took a sip of coffee.

‘If the reception is going to be here, are you going to decorate it? You could have balloons or flowers?’ Wendy looked around the bakery.

‘I’ve spoken to Ian about this. We quite like the idea of asking the children to make paper chains. We thought they’d look lovely strewn across the ceiling.’

‘That’s a good idea.’ Molly nodded.

‘It was actually Ian’s idea. He thought it would be nice if we have them over for tea at the lighthouse and make them altogether.’ Elsie looked at Teresa and Wendy.

‘Mine would love that.’ Teresa nodded.

‘Hudson too. Although I’m not sure how much help he’ll be. He might just rip them apart.’ Wendy grimaced.

‘Are you going to have anything on the tables?’ Freya asked. ‘Like any table centres or anything?’

Elsie nodded. ‘I saw an example of one in one of these magazines.’ Elsie searched through the pile of magazines, pulling one out and flicking through the pages. ‘Here...’ Turning it around, she showed everyone. ‘I think this is

really sweet, having a mixture of candles and flowers on the tables. The candles almost represent the lighthouse and Ian's job, and as for the flowers we could have peonies to match the bouquets.'

'Oh, they're beautiful and I love the idea of the candles representing the lighthouse.' Brooke peered at the magazine photo. 'If we get the candles and the flowers, I think a couple of us could make them up ourselves.'

'That would be wonderful, if you don't mind.' Elsie turned to Molly and Wendy. 'Is there anything else on the list?'

'There're the wedding cake and the favours, although I'd like to make a suggestion about the wedding cake, unless you've got something in mind?' Wendy frowned.

'No, you're the expert. I'm kind of relying on you for some ideas.' Elsie chuckled.

'In that case, I'd love to design and make it and for it to be a surprise on the day.' Wendy shifted in her seat. 'Of course, if you'd rather choose your own design, I completely understand.'

'Oh, Wendy, love, I absolutely adore that idea.' Elsie clasped Wendy's hand.

'Are you sure?'

'Absolutely. Thank you.' Taking a tissue from her pocket, Elsie patted her eyes. 'I have no clue about wedding favours, though. I'd love to give our guests something practical and yet lovely at the same time.'

'How about coasters? I could make up some with the lighthouse on, maybe? And your wedding date or your names written at the bottom?' Carrie looked across the table.

'Now, that's a wonderful idea. Maybe not with our names or wedding date on though. I don't want everyone thinking they have to remember our wedding every time they use it.'

'Okay. Great. I'll draw up a few designs and bring them over tomorrow.'

'Excellent. Thank you, love. Thank you, all of you. This all means so much to both me and Ian, you all helping us plan like this.'

'It's our pleasure.' Wendy grinned.

'Well, pleasure or not, I know how hard work I've been, so thank you for putting up with me.' Elsie laid her hands palms down on the table. 'Well, I think that's it.'

'You're forgetting one thing.' Diane sucked in her breath.

'What's that, love?'

‘Your stag and hen nights.’ Diane grinned, her eyes lighting up.

‘Oh no, we really don’t want any fuss.’

‘You could have a night out in Trestow?’

‘No, no, no.’ Elsie chuckled. ‘I’d be sound asleep before the club starts getting lively. Ian and I did wonder if we could join you all for the pub quiz the week before, though? We thought that could be our stag and hen nights.’ Elsie looked across at Wendy. ‘That’s if we can find someone to babysit little Huddy, that is.’

‘I’m sure Gavin will. He’s not keen on the pub quiz nights anyway and he’ll have Rueben, Toby and Pippa anyway, so what’s one more?’ Teresa grinned.

‘About the equivalent of twenty more children when you get Hudson and Pippa together.’ Wendy laughed.

‘That’s true. I’m sure he’ll cope. I can’t promise Hudson will get to sleep on time, though. The number of times I walk in the front door after the pub quiz, and I’m greeted by Rueben and Pippa.’ Teresa shook her head. ‘Toby, of course, loves his sleep, so he’s always tucked up in bed.’

‘Aw bless him. If you don’t think Gavin would mind, that would be great, please?’ Wendy smiled.

‘I’ll check with him, but I’m more than ninety-nine percent sure he’ll be happy having an extra one for the evening.’

‘Right, with everything decided, let’s eat this lot up before it gets too cold.’ Elsie indicated the pizza on the table.

Chapter Nineteen



‘That’ll be two pounds and twenty pence, please?’ Evie grinned over the counter at the small toddler.

Standing on her tiptoes, the toddler held up her hands; the coins clasped tightly inside. ‘Here, go.’

‘Thank you.’ Reaching down, Evie took the money.

‘Sorry, I know it’s a pain, but she likes to do it herself.’ The girl’s mum laughed and shook her head.

‘That’s not a problem.’ Evie grinned as she popped the money in the till before waving at the small girl as she skipped outside.

‘Morning.’

‘Hi, Jack.’ Grinning, Evie leaned across the counter and kissed him on the lips, savouring the familiar tingle as his skin touched hers.

‘I thought I’d pop by and see if you wanted to pop out on your lunch break?’

‘Oh, I can’t today. Sorry. I’ve promised Elsie I’ll go with her to the florists to order the wedding flowers. Are you still free to go to the cinema with Diane and Harry this evening, though?’

‘Absolutely. No worries, I’ll see you this evening then. I’d best dash.’ He tapped the counter.

‘Okay. Have a good day.’ Grinning, she waved at him.

‘You too.’ Blowing her a kiss, he disappeared out of the door and back out onto the cobbles.

‘Things are going well between you two, aren’t they?’ Diane nudged her shoulder.

‘Yes, they are.’ Evie shook her head and laughed. ‘And to think I’d vowed to myself years ago that I’d never risk getting into a relationship just to get hurt.’

‘I don’t think Jack will hurt you. You two look as though you’re made for each other.’ Diane grinned.

‘I don’t know. No one can predict that.’

‘No, but self-fulfilling prophecy and all that. If you go into a relationship expecting to get hurt, you probably will. If you go in thinking you’ll spend

your whole lives in love, you're more likely to work on it.'

Evie nodded. 'I can see where you're coming from.'

'It's not often I say something quite so profound.' Diane shrugged. 'I think it's true, though.'

'It could be.'

'And are you?'

'Am I what?'

'Madly in love with him yet?'

Blushing, Evie looked away. 'No! I've not known him long.'

'Time doesn't have a thing to do with it.' Diane grinned and turned to serve a customer.

Stepping back, Evie picked up the cloth and began wiping the back counter down. This feeling wasn't love, was it? It couldn't be. She couldn't love someone without knowing everything about them, could she? She shrugged. Whatever it was that she felt towards Jack, she knew how it made her feel and that was happy. The little flip of her stomach every time he walked into the bakery, the way his grin made her want to smile too. She grinned.



'OH, THESE ARE JUST beautiful, aren't they?' Elsie picked up a stem and laid the delicate peony head in the palm of her hand. 'And this colour, the pale pink, that was my gran's favourite of all of them. Every birthday, my dad would buy her a bunch and she'd display them proudly on the window ledge in her best vase. She said they always made the postie and anyone else who walked past the window smile.' Elsie held the flower to her nose and breathed in deeply.

'They're really beautiful.' Picking up another one, she sniffed it. The sweet, earthy aroma filling her lungs. 'They're going to look perfect against your dress as well. The delicate leaves will complement the lace on your dress.'

'Oh, I do hope so, love. I'm so looking forward to walking down the aisle towards my Ian. I know none of this really matters, not really. It's nice to plan the wedding and to make everything just-so, mark the occasion, but at the end of the day as long as me and Ian walk out of that church as husband and wife, nothing else really matters.'

Evie nodded. It was all about the love between couples then.

A woman in a green tabard walked towards them. ‘Afternoon. My name’s Sandra. I apologise for the wait. How can I help you today?’

‘Hi, Sandra. I’m Elsie and this is Evie. We’re here to order a bridal bouquet, some bridesmaids’ bouquets, a little flower girl basket and some corsages, please?’

‘Certainly. Have you an idea of the style you’d like and the flowers you want to be included?’ Sandra led the way towards the counter, slipped behind it and pulled out a large order book.

‘Yes, I’d like quite simple and elegant bouquets made up of these pale pink peonies and perhaps a little foliage, do you think?’ Elsie laid the peony she was holding on top of a pile of white tissue paper on the counter.

‘Some foliage would help give the bouquets a little more structure. Yes, I can certainly do that for you. How many bridesmaids’ bouquets and corsages do you need?’ Sandra began writing in the order book, her pen poised for the numbers.

‘Oh, let me see.’ Elsie began listing names and ticking them off on her fingers. ‘Sixteen bridesmaid bouquets. That’s right, isn’t it, love?’ Elsie turned to Evie.

‘That does sound a lot.’ Copying Elsie, she pictured the people who had been around the table at the planning evening and ticked them off one by one on her fingers. ‘Yes, sixteen, that’s right.’

‘Sixteen?’ Sandra looked up.

‘Yes, please.’

Nodding, Sandra wrote the number in the book. ‘And the corsages? How many of those do you need?’

‘One for the groom, two for the best men, thirteen for the ushers. Oh, can you add another one? We might as well order Jack one, being as he’s doing the photos, mightn’t we? And three smaller ones for our pageboys, please?’

‘Okay.’ Nodding slowly, Sandra looked up. ‘I’ve got to admit this is the largest wedding order I’ve been asked to do. It’s not a problem. I like a challenge.’ She grinned. ‘And when is the wedding?’

‘The nineteenth.’

‘Of?’

‘This month.’ Elsie chuckled. ‘Are you still up for the challenge?’

‘Yes, yes. It’s doable. Just. If you have a few minutes, I can show you a few different options for the foliage and bouquet styles so I can pop the order through for the flowers sooner rather than later?’

‘Yes, yes. That’s fine.’

Sandra lifted a huge book onto the counter and opened it. Colour photographs of an array of flowers and foliage stared back at them. ‘I’ll just get you both a stool and we can have a chat. Would either of you like a drink?’

‘I’d love a coffee, please?’ Elsie perched on one of the stools Sandra carried round.

‘I’m fine, thanks.’ Sitting down, Evie peered at the photographs.

‘Is that your phone, love?’ Elsie nodded towards Evie’s coat pocket.

‘Oh, yes.’ Shaking her head, she pulled it out and frowned. It was Melissa. Why was ringing her? Oh, yes, the email. With everything going on in the bay, it almost felt as though she’d stepped away from her job and London months ago. ‘Sorry, I should get this.’

Nodding, Elsie turned back to the book.

Stepping outside, Evie accepted the call. ‘Melissa?’

Chapter Twenty



‘E vie, hi. I’m sorry this phone call has taken me a while to get around to. As you can imagine, everything is a bit manic at the office at the moment.’

Evie took a deep breath in. Of course it was, but it was only in response to Melissa’s own actions. What had she been expecting when she’d promoted Steven to partner?

‘Are you still there or is it a bad connection down in the little village?’

‘I’m still here.’

‘Good, good. As I was saying, I’d rather hoped to reply to your email before now, but rush, rush, rush. You know how it is.’

Evie pulled her coat tighter around her. Why didn’t she just get on with it? ‘What can I do for you?’

‘It’s rather more what I can do for you. I can offer you an explanation which is why I didn’t instantly reply to your email. I wanted to give you the courtesy of ringing you and explaining.’

‘Go on, then.’ Evie kicked at a shallow puddle. It must have rained during the night.

‘Yes, well, I’m aware that some of my actions and perhaps some of the conversations we had leading up to you going away may have suggested I’d been thinking of making you partner...’

‘You’d more than suggested it.’ Evie shook her head. Melissa had literally told her to use up her holiday before her promotion. She couldn’t have been clearer.

‘Yes, well, I’m afraid a few issues came to light, which made me question my decision and ...’

‘What do you mean? What issues? I’m a great solicitor, you know that. What issues are you talking about?’ She shoved her free hand in her pocket. She hadn’t meant to sound so self-assured, but she was. She received nothing but praise from her clients and for Melissa to suggest otherwise... She glared at the lamppost across the road.

‘Just a few things.’

‘What things?’

‘I’d rather not say.’ Melissa paused, stumbling over her words. ‘I wouldn’t want to betray anyone’s confidence.’

‘Don’t tell me someone has issues with me and then refuse to explain them. I have a right to know.’

‘Look, it’s Jennifer. She’s finding it awkward to work with you.’

‘Jennifer?’ Evie closed her eyes. What was Melissa playing at? It had been Jennifer who had rung and told her that Steven had been promoted instead of her. It had been Jennifer who had been sending her daily updates, telling her how Steven was parading around as though he owned the firm. ‘It’s not Jennifer.’

‘Evie, just accept it, would you?’

Melissa was getting irritated now, Evie could hear it in her voice, the way she spoke, her voice clipped and short. She kept quiet. She’d worked with Melissa long enough to know that she couldn’t stand awkward silences. If there was a sure-fire way of Melissa dropping the act and telling the truth, it was to say nothing.

‘Just accept that sometimes we all make mistakes. Decisions have to be made for the greater good of the firm.’ Melissa was speaking quickly now, her voice climbing an octave.

Leaning her head back, Evie looked at the grey clouds forming above her.

‘All right, I’ll tell you, but you mustn’t breathe a word of it to anyone. Not to the team, not to Jennifer, no one, do you understand?’

‘I understand.’ Her voice was quiet, steady.

‘The firms going under, gone under. I don’t know, I’ve not looked at the business account for weeks now. Steven’s buying me out. I had to make him partner. That’s the only way I could save the firm.’

Steven had bought the firm out? She shook her head. Why hadn’t Melissa told her about the money troubles? How were there money troubles? The firm was one of the best in the whole city, if not the best. ‘How?’

‘I’ve been having some problems. I took my eye off the ball, didn’t I?’

‘But why didn’t you say anything?’

‘I couldn’t. I just couldn’t.’

Evie closed her eyes. ‘And the issues?’

‘There are no issues, you know that. You’re one of the best solicitors I know. No, the best. No one ever has any issues with you.’

‘So, what happens now?’

‘I don’t know. I’d hoped things would cruise along as normal but Steven’s already throwing his weight around the place, the jumped up little so and so.’ The exasperation was clear in Melissa’s voice.

‘And just to clarify, you instructed me to take the holiday I was owed so you could make Steven partner whilst I was out of the way?’

‘What was I supposed to do? I had to make him partner. I had to save the firm, and I knew you’d somehow put a stop to it if you’d been here.’

‘Too right I would have.’ Evie spoke quietly.

‘What’s that?’

‘Nothing.’

‘I’m sorry, okay? I didn’t know what else to do.’

Evie listened as the click of a door opened and shut, and muffled voices wafted through the phone.

‘I’ve got to go. Speak soon.’ And that was it. Conversation over.

‘Evie?’

Looking up, Evie watched as Jack ran across the road and pushed her phone into her pocket. ‘Hi.’

‘Hey.’ Jack leaned across and kissed her before standing back and looking her in the eye. ‘Is everything all right? Has something happened?’

‘That was Melissa on the phone.’

‘Your boss, Melissa?’

‘That’s the one. She’s just told me that she promoted Steven over me because he’s bought the firm out.’

‘Oh wow. And you didn’t realise it was for sale?’

‘I didn’t realise Melissa was having money problems full stop.’ Evie sighed.

‘I guess in that case, at least the firm’s not going bust. You still have a job. That’s a good thing, right?’ He grinned.

‘I suppose. It means working under him, though. He’s only been there a year, and he’s already built a reputation for himself as being awkward.’

‘Ah.’ Frowning, Jack ran his fingers through his hair.

‘Anyway, I’m supposed to be in there, helping Elsie order her flowers.’ She pointed at the florists behind her. ‘I’m not going to let Melissa or Steven, or any of it, for that matter, spoil it.’

‘That’s it. What will be, will be and by the sounds of it, you worrying about it and letting it ruin your day isn’t going to help matters, anyway.’

‘Exactly.’ She took a deep breath in and rolled her shoulders back. He was right. She could think what she wanted, say what she wanted, but it wasn’t going to change the reality of what had happened. ‘What are you here for?’

‘I’ve come to show Savannah the photos from the other night.’ He pulled a memory stick from his pocket and held it up.

‘Oh yuck, I hope you’ve deleted the ones of me in that hideous dress, or at least applied as many filters over the top of them as you can.’ She shuddered at the memory.

‘You looked pretty stunning.’ He smiled and traced his index finger down her cheek and beneath her chin. ‘Besides, it was that hideous dress that you were wearing when we had our first kiss.’

‘So, it was.’ She laughed. ‘Oh, look, and I still have the boyfriend and the bruised hips to remind me.’

Chuckling, he shook his head. ‘So, I’m your boyfriend now then?’

She shrugged. ‘I don’t really like the term boyfriend. It reminds me of snatched snogs on the playground as a teenager.’

‘Yes, it does rather, doesn’t it?’ He frowned. ‘Partner?’

Grinning, she nodded. ‘Partner sounds good. When we’re bored, we can pretend to be the other type of partners and travel the area solving crimes.’ Stepping forward, she circled her arms around his neck and pulled her towards him. As soon as her lips touched his and he enveloped in his hug, the conversation with Melissa felt as though it had happened years ago.

Chapter Twenty One



Sinking onto the bed, Evie laid down, stretching her arms above her head. She just needed five minutes. A five-minute nap before getting ready for the pub quiz and Elsie and Ian's hen and stag dos.

She grinned. The last week or so had passed in a happy blur. Her relationship with Jack had been going from strength to strength, and she definitely knew she was falling for him. They'd been spending every spare moment together, getting to know each other, delving into each other's pasts and hopes for the future. It was perfect.

She laughed as she closed her eyes. She could just imagine what people's reactions would be if she changed her social media status from single to in a relationship. They probably would believe her. Some would assume she'd had her account hacked, and who could blame them? She, herself, was the last person who ever thought she'd feel like this, be in a relationship with someone.

Five minutes and then she'd get changed.



OPENING HER EYES, SHE listened to the voices in the living room next door. She could hear Elsie and Ian, Wendy and Connor. Sitting up, she listened again. Was that Jack's voice too? They weren't supposed to be leaving until half seven. Why was he here so early?

Leaning over, she turned the small alarm clock around to face her and frowned. It was twenty-five past seven already. Jumping off the bed, she pulled on a clean pair of jeans and a black satin top covered in flowers.

'Evie, are you ready?' Jack called through the door.

'Almost.' Opening the door, she pulled him inside and held her arms out to the sides. 'I laid down for a five-minute nap and have only just woken up. Look at me, my hair looks as though I've got a bad case of static electricity.'

Jack laughed and touched a wild strand of her hair. 'Do you want me to stall them?'

‘No, could you just, I don’t know, tell them to go ahead and we’ll meet them there?’ She moved spray bottles, deodorant and lotion around on her dressing table. ‘I can’t even find the hairbrush.’

‘I’ll go and tell them.’ Jack pointed to the door before glancing back at her. ‘You may have wild hair, but you still look gorgeous to me.’

Rolling her eyes, Evie began scooping everything off the surface of the dressing table into the top drawer. Still nothing. No hairbrush. What had she done with it? She glanced in the mirror and yanked at a knot. She couldn’t go out like this. It was bad enough that Jack had seen her in this state.

Rapping on the door, Jack stepped inside. ‘They’ve gone. Elsie said she’ll make sure we’ve got a drink waiting for us.’

‘Thanks, I still can’t find the thing. I’ll have to shave it all off at this rate or wear a hat.’ Where was it? She’d used it this morning. A hairbrush couldn’t just disappear on its own.

‘Is this it?’ Jack reached behind the alarm clock on the bedside table and held up the bright pink hairbrush.

‘Yes! Thank you.’ Taking the brush, she raked it through her hair, jamming it right into a particularly knotty section. Turning, she laughed, the hairbrush stuck. ‘Still think I look gorgeous?’

‘Always. Here, come and sit down.’ Shuffling back on the bed, he patted the space between his legs.

Sitting down, she closed her eyes as he gently removed the hairbrush and brushed the knots out. ‘You’ve done this before, haven’t you?’

‘Can you tell?’ He chuckled. ‘Yes, my sister used to get terrible knots. Although, to be fair, it was her own fault, as she would refuse to have her hair brushed for days upon days. She’d come to me when she’d had enough of the knots. She said I was gentler than our mum.’

‘Aw, that’s lovely of you.’ Relaxing her shoulders, she closed her eyes, the rhythmic, gentle brushing sweeping her worries away.

‘Don’t go back to sleep, will you?’ Finishing, he laid the hairbrush on the bed and smoothed her hair down with his fingers. ‘All finished.’

‘Thank you.’ Standing up, she looked back at him. ‘I don’t suppose you can do my make-up too, can you?’

‘Don’t push it.’ Chuckling, he leaned back against the pillows and watched as she brushed eyeshadow on.



LETTING GO OF JACK'S hand, Evie slipped into the chair next to Nina and looked around the huge table. She recognised all the women. Everyone who had come wedding dress shopping was there. She also recognised Simon and Chris.

Jack leaned in close to her. 'I bet you're wondering who everyone is? Ollie is sitting next to Daisy, Connor is next to Wendy, and Harry is Diane's partner.' He pointed around the table. 'Scott is next to Olivia, and you know Chris. There's Jude next to Molly. Charlie is Lauren's partner, Daniel with Carrie, Matt and Gemma, Heidi and Liam, and Brooke and Max. You remember Simon, the police officer from when we first met? And then there's Rowan next to Nina.'

Evie held her hand up, waving to everyone as Jack sat back in his seat.

'Nice to meet you, Evie.'

'Hi, Evie.'

'You know I don't stand a chance of remembering everyone's names, don't you?' She spoke quietly to Jack.

'It's a bit daunting meeting so many new people at the same time, but you'll soon learn everyone's names.' Jack grinned.

'Cocktails for you both?' Teresa poured two glasses of a blue concoction and passed them to Rowan, who passed them to Nina, who then gave them to Evie and Jack.

'Lovely, thank you.' Taking a sip, Evie coughed. It was a lot stronger than the blue lagoon cocktail she used to drink.

'Right, now everybody is here,' Diane looked around the table before pulling a canvas bag from beneath the table. 'We can give Elsie her hen do gear.'

Evie laughed as Diane pulled a bright white, stiff veil from the bag, two learner driver 'L' plates, and a tiara with plastic hearts on.

'Oh, I don't think I need to wear those.' Elsie raised her eyebrows.

'Aw come on, look, the tiara even lights up.' Diane fiddled with the plastic tiara until the hearts flashed a cerise pink.

'Go on, you have to. They've gone to the effort of buying them for you.' Ian nudged Elsie's shoulder and chuckled.

'Don't you think you've got away with it either, Ian.' Connor laughed as he pulled out another bag and laid a headband on the table with large antlers sticking up from it.

Covering his eyes with his hand, Ian turned to Elsie and stage-whispered, 'Quick, let's do a runner.'

'Oh no, you don't. Come on, they'll look good on you.' Picking up the antlers, Ollie laughed as he placed them on Ian's head.

'Your turn now, Elsie.' Standing up, Lauren stuck the 'L' plates to the veil before securing the veil in Elsie's hair and slipping the tiara on over her head.

'Brilliant. Quick, we need to get some photos of this.' Diane pulled her mobile out from her pocket and held it up. 'Smile.'

'I spy something going on over at the table by the window.' A loud whistle pierced through the conversation in the pub as Gerald, the landlord, picked up the microphone and held his hand above his eyes. 'Are they antlers I can see? And a veil? Woohoo, everyone, Elsie and Ian are on their stag and hen dos. Stand up and give us a twirl.'

Pushing her chair back, Elsie grimaced and stood up, holding her hand out for Ian. They twirled around, the 'L' plates on Elsie's veil flapping against the cheap material and Ian's stag antlers slipping over his face.

A huge cheer and round of applause erupted through the pub as people stood and watched.

'I'm sure you'll all join me in wishing this lovely couple the best wishes possible for their wedding day as we all ask the same question, why has it taken you so blooming long to realise what we could all see years ago?' Gerald raised a glass. 'To Elsie and Ian. Wishing you both the very best of wishes for the journey ahead.'

'To Elsie and Ian.'

'Thank you.' Raising her hand in acknowledgement, Elsie returned to her seat, shortly followed by Ian as he pushed the antlers out of his eyes. 'Well, I wasn't expecting that.'

Ian rubbed her hand as he settled back in his chair.

'Okay, and now, after all the excitement, I will begin our quiz of the evening and in honour of Elsie and Ian's impending nuptials, the theme for tonight's quiz is Famous Weddings.'

'Ooh, this should be good. Molly, you'll know most of these, won't you?' Nina looked across at Molly before turning to Evie. 'Molly used to be a journalist specialising in weddings, didn't you?' She turned back to Molly.

'I did, but that feels like forever ago now, although it's only been a few months, really. I can't promise I'll know the answers, though. My brain is

more focused on the real-life trends as opposed to the crazy world of celebrity weddings.’ Molly laughed.

‘Question number one; Which celebrity groom had his dog walk down the aisle in a tuxedo?’ Gerald cleared his throat. ‘Wait for it. You have four possible choices. A: Tom Brady, B: Hugh Jackman, C: Adam Sandler or D: Josh Lucas?’

‘I could imagine Hugh Jackman doing that. He looks like someone who loves animals.’ Lauren tapped her fingers against the surface of the table.

‘I know this one. It’s Josh Lucas.’ Rowan picked up his glass.

‘Who even is Josh Lucas? I can’t picture him?’ Carrie frowned.

‘He was the guy in Sweet Home Alabama, I think.’ Paige smiled.

‘Oh, yes. I know him.’ Carrie nodded.

‘It’s not him. It was Adam Sandler. His dog walked down the aisle in a tuxedo.’ Molly whispered across the table.

‘Okay, Adam Sandler, it is.’ Wendy scribbled on the answer sheet.

‘Question number two; Which famous rocker bride walked down the aisle in a black dress? A: Pink, B: Gwen Stefani, C: Courtney Love or D: Avril Lavigne?’

‘That might be me in a few days.’ Elsie looked at Ian and grinned.

‘Have you got a black wedding dress?’ He raised his eyebrows.

‘Maybe.’ Elsie shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

‘I quite like the idea of wearing a black wedding dress. It’d be a bit different, wouldn’t it? Surprise all the guests.’ Jessie grinned.

‘I can imagine you wearing something like that.’ Draping his arm around Jessie’s shoulders, Simon chuckled.

‘Question number three...’

‘Oh no, we’ve not got an answer to question two yet. Who wore the black wedding dress?’ Wendy looked around the table, the pen hovering above the answer sheet.

‘Avril Lavigne.’ Olivia called across from her seat.

‘Great.’

‘Question number four...’

‘Ah, we’ve had it now. We’ve already missed a question.’ Wendy sighed and picked up her glass.

‘Here, I’ll write, you lot listen. I don’t have a clue who all these celebrities are, anyway.’ Taking the pen and answer sheet, Elsie turned and watched Gerald.

Chapter Twenty Two



‘It’s your wedding day tomorrow!’ Diane clapped her hands together as Elsie placed two trays of freshly baked pastries on the counter. ‘I feel you should be relaxing or having your nails done or something, not baking croissants.’

‘And if I get my nails done, they’ll only get ruined the moment I step back in this place. No, this is my happy place. I’m glad to be here. Besides, we’re closing early to transform it into the reception venue, aren’t we?’

‘Yes, I guess so.’ Diane nodded. ‘At least promise us you’ll relax tonight? We can do all the running around and decorating and that.’

‘Umm, maybe.’ Shaking her head, Elsie touched Diane’s forearm before disappearing back into the kitchen.

‘I can’t believe she’s not getting pampered or even just having a day to lounge around and do nothing but eat chocolate and drink copious amounts of champagne. That’s what I’ll be doing when I get married, I can promise you that.’ Diane blew a strand of hair from her face and slipped the warm trays beneath the counter.

Evie waved goodbye to her customer and pulled her phone from her pocket. Yep, she had an email. She’d thought she’d heard a notification. She clicked through to her inbox and began reading. What? It was from Steven. She could see that from his email address without the need for him to sign off as partner. She rolled her eyes as she read his list of requirements from ‘*his staff*’. He required ‘*his staff*’ to arrive at the office fifteen minutes early so that ‘*tasks can begin promptly at the beginning of the working day*’.

She snorted. The majority of people at the firm went above and beyond their job requirements, starting work early and staying late. This was just spoon-feeding. The whole email was. There was even a whole section discussing stationary, yes, stationary.

‘Is everything okay?’ Brooke glanced across at her.

‘The new partner at work has just sent an email stating how he wants ‘*his staff*...’ She hooked her index fingers around the words, ‘...to behave, such as arriving in the office early, which everyone does anyway. Not that he would have noticed because it was always him getting in late.’ She rolled her eyes.

‘That’s really annoying. People don’t need that. They need to feel valued, not just told what to do, especially if they’re doing it already.’ Brooke turned to the next customer.

‘Exactly. He’s only been there a year, almost everyone else has worked there for years, he doesn’t have a clue how things work. He hasn’t even bothered to get to know anyone.’ She looked up from her phone and stepped forward. ‘Sorry, what can I get you today?’



‘THERE’S SOMEONE AT the door for you.’ Laughing, Brooke pointed to the door of the bakery.

Passing the cake box to the customer in front of her, Evie looked up and grinned. Jack was standing just outside the door, holding up two cones of chips.

‘Go on, you’d best go on your lunch break before they get cold.’ Smiling, Brooke nodded towards Jack.

‘Are you sure?’

‘Yes, it’s time for your lunch break, anyway.’

‘Okay, thanks.’ Slipping her apron over her head, she grabbed her coat, shrugging into it as she walked towards the door. ‘Please tell me one of those is for me? I’m starving.’

‘It is.’ Passing her a cone, he grinned.

‘Thank you.’ Popping a chip into her mouth, she savoured the hot, salty, vinegary taste. ‘You remembered the vinegar. Thank you. How’s your morning been?’

‘Good fun, thanks. I’ve been up at the church testing the lighting and the best positions for the photos.’

‘It’s crazy that it’s Elsie and Ian’s big day tomorrow. When I arrived in the bay, it seemed so far off.’

‘Time has a funny way of sneaking up on you like that. How was your morning?’

‘The bakery was good. As usual. The customers were all lovely, and it’s so much fun working with Diane and Brooke behind the counter. Although, I received an email from the new partner at work, Steven, which just outlined a load of rubbish he expects from everyone.’ She shrugged. ‘It wouldn’t be so bad, but the only person not doing each and every one of his stated requirements is himself. It’s ridiculous.’

‘Was the email just to you or to everyone?’

‘To everyone. It’s just insulting. I can imagine the morale is plummeting and the atmosphere must be awful.’ She shook her head. ‘The stories Jennifer, my legal secretary, has been telling me about are just plain stupid. Apparently, he’s been asking people to do silly things which they shouldn’t be doing like fetching him a newspaper, things like that, and when they refuse, he’s been dropping in that he’s their boss and giving them dates for their staff appraisals.’

‘He sounds like a first-class idiot.’

‘He is. I never really understood why Melissa hired him in the first place.’ She rolled her eyes. ‘Of course, now it all makes sense. She must have planned him to buy her out all the way back then.’ She groaned. ‘I really don’t know how long I’ll last before I give him a piece of my mind and get fired.’

‘Why don’t you just leave then?’

‘Yeah, right.’

He paused. ‘I’m being serious. If you’re already worried about going back, why don’t you just leave? You could start your own law firm, or find another job.’

‘It’s not as easy as that, though, is it?’ She wiped a chip in the grains of salt clinging to the inside of the cardboard cone and popped it in her mouth. ‘Not in the real world.’

‘It was for me.’ He shrugged. ‘It wasn’t without its challenges at the beginning, but it’s a decision I have never regretted.’

They walked down the slope and onto the beach. Pausing, she watched the rolling waves encroaching up the sand. It wouldn’t be that easy. She had her apartment, her life. Okay, she had her apartment and her job. Every other aspect of her life had shrunk the more she’d worked. ‘I’ve put my whole career into that firm. My life.’

‘Maybe it’s time you made your career work for you instead of living to work.’ He stopped next to her, the sleeve of his coat brushing against hers.

‘That’s impossible.’

‘Not really. I didn’t ever think I’d start my own business, so if I can do it, anyone can. Besides, you’re in the perfect position to start your own firm.’

‘How do you figure that out?’ She looked at him and, reaching across, tucked his hair behind his ear.

‘You were ready to be promoted to partner of a huge law firm in the city. You would be standing here as a partner now if your boss hadn’t been haemorrhaging money from the firm. If you’re ready to be a partner of the firm you’re working at now, then how different would it be to start your own? You’d be starting from afresh, so you’d grow your business as and when you felt comfortable to. You wouldn’t have to answer to the likes of Steven or be played by people like your boss. You’d be the boss.’

‘Hmm.’

‘You could even start it down here. I hear Trestow needs a new law firm.’ He grinned at her and raised his eyebrows.

‘Oi! Are you just trying to get me to move here?’ Laughing, she threw a chip at him.

‘Oi yourself! You’ve got to admit it’s a good idea? You’d be the boss; you could start the firm anywhere you wanted. Just please try to keep it within, say, a travelling distance of six hours?’ He chuckled. ‘No, seriously. I’d come and visit you wherever you decided to base yourself. You know that.’

‘Even the Outer Hebrides?’

‘Even the Outer Hebrides, though I’d expect you to throw in a super thick, storm-resistant coat if that was the case.’

Taking a deep breath, she looked up and down the beach. With the row of shops and the bakery on one side and the lighthouse standing tall on the other, would there really be a better place to move to? It wasn’t such a bad idea. She had made friends here. She felt welcome, an equal. She could walk down the street and say hello or ask people how their day was going. She’d never done that in London. She’d never even thought to. ‘Do you know what? It’s not such a bad idea after all.’

‘You know I’d support you in anything you choose to do, don’t you?’ Scrunching up his empty chip cone, he drew her in for a hug.

‘I do, yes.’ Tucking her head between his neck and his shoulder, she held him tightly. There was so much pulling her to quit work and start afresh down here. Not that it would feel afresh, not with the friendship group, the bakery family and, of course, Jack by her side. There was more in the bay to keep her here than in London, in the city she’d lived in for all these years.

Chapter Twenty Three



‘Is that about right?’ Holding the top rung of the ladder, Evie held the end of the paper chain to the ceiling.

‘A little to the left. No, sorry, the right. A bit more. Perfect.’ Brooke held the ladder as Evie stepped down.

‘It’s really starting to come together, isn’t it?’ Evie looked around the bakery. White swathes of fabric covered the bakery counter where the buffet would be placed, and the wedding planning counter on which the wedding cake would be displayed. The coffee and cake counter had become the bar, which Gavin had spent hours decorating. During the week, Connor and Ollie had sourced and printed old photographs of Ian and Elsie throughout the years, which Lauren, Charlie, Freya and Chris were now blu-tacking to the walls of the bakery.

Daisy, Ollie, Connor, Jessie and Nina were all at the restaurant preparing the buffet for tomorrow. Everyone else was busy repositioning tables and laying tablecloths. The four children were keeping Elsie and Ian busy upstairs and the soon-to-be happy couple were under strict instructions they were not allowed down to the bakery under any circumstances until the wedding reception tomorrow and that they were to exit and enter the flat through the kitchen door. Diane and Harry were currently hanging bed sheets from the ceiling to construct a makeshift tunnel from the door to the flat to the bakery kitchen door, so there would be no peeking.

‘What time are the table centres coming?’ Carrie finished hanging a huge ‘*Just Married*’ banner across the window.

‘Ten o’clock tomorrow morning.’ Diane called back from the stepladder.

‘And what time do we need to be here to get ready?’

‘The hairdressers are coming at eleven, I think. That way, hopefully they’ll be able to get through everyone before the wedding at three.’ Molly picked up a clipboard.

‘I’ll go and see how Wendy is getting on.’ Ducking through the bedsheet tunnel, Evie made her way through to the kitchen.

‘Hi, how’s it looking out there?’

‘Really nice. It’s mostly set up and ready, I think. How are you getting on?’ Evie sat on the stool opposite where Wendy was working.

Looking up from Elsie and Ian’s wedding cake, Wendy put the piping bag down and spun the cake slowly on the cake stand. ‘I think I’m almost done. I don’t know, I keep doubting myself. Do you think I need to add some more flowers?’

Evie watched as Wendy pivoted the cake. It was stunning. Classic and romantic. The white royal icing covering the three tiers was smoothed to perfection and the white icing detail was so intricate it was difficult to see all the detail without standing right next to it. As for the pale pink peonies, Evie wasn’t sure anyone would be able to tell the difference between those which Wendy had handcrafted out of icing and those in Elsie’s bouquet. ‘It’s beautiful. Stunning. I think it’s absolutely perfect just as it is.’

‘Are you sure? I’m a bit worried about this bit here. It looks a bit different from the rest of it. Just here, do you see it?’

Standing up, Evie walked towards Wendy and squinted at the cake. ‘I can’t see anything wrong. It all looks perfect.’

‘Okay. Thanks. I think I’m just doubting myself. I need to step away, don’t I?’

‘One hundred percent. You need to step away.’ Evie grinned as the kitchen door swung open.

‘Woo-hoo! It’s all set for the big day tomorrow!’ Diane clapped her hands excitedly.

‘Wow, Wendy! That cake is amazing!’ Pausing in the doorway, Freya clapped her hands on her cheeks. ‘How do you do it?’

‘Thanks.’ Wendy chewed her lip. ‘Freya, can you give me a hand carrying it to the cake fridge, please?’

‘Yes, okay.’ Freya grimaced. ‘If you trust me not to drop it.’

‘You won’t.’ Wendy laughed.

‘Carrie, where are the wedding favour coasters? Shall we put them out now to save time in the morning?’ Olivia looked over at Carrie.

‘Yes, good idea.’ Carrie slapped her forehead. ‘Although I’ve just realised, I’ve left them in the workshop. I’ll run back and get them.’

‘I’ll come with you and give you a hand.’ Olivia grabbed her coat from the pile on the steel table.

‘Me too. I’ve not seen your workshop yet.’ Freya picked up her coat.

Evie looked down at her phone as her notification signalled another email. Opening it up, she rolled her eyes. It was Steven again. This time, it seemed the whole purpose of the email was to describe a new centralised storing system for clients' files. She pinched the bridge of her nose. It wouldn't work. She could see that just by reading the email. Everyone keeping their clients' files in their own offices worked. He just seemed to be changing things to put his stamp on the firm, not to improve the services they provided.

'You okay?' Molly touched her arm.

Glancing up, Evie nodded. 'Yes, I think I am. I just need to pop outside and send an email.'

'Okay. I think we're going to head up to the flat and spend a bit of time with Elsie and Ian, so if we're not still in here, that's where we'll be.'

'Okay, thanks.' Smiling, Evie shrugged into her coat and pulled open the back door. Stepping out into the courtyard, she peered into the kitchen before closing the door. All of these people had come together to do their best to make Elsie and Ian's big day tomorrow perfect. And each one of them had accepted her into their bakery family, no questions asked and not expecting anything in return. She knew what she had to do. She knew what she wanted to do.

Sitting down at the small metal garden table, Evie ignored the cold seeping through her jeans and began writing out the email. She copied both Melissa and Steven in and was polite, but to the point. She could no longer see a position for herself at the firm.

And send. She'd done it. She'd resigned.

Clasping her phone in her hands, she gripped it to stop them from shaking. She was jobless, unemployed. She shook her head. She needed to start planning. There was a lot to do if she was going to make the move here. She'd need to sell her apartment and find somewhere to rent down here in the meantime. Collect her things. Draw up a business plan.

Leaning back against the cold chair, she grinned. She was doing this. She really was. She was moving and starting her own business. New horizons were opening up for her, she was jumping into the unknown. She glanced back towards the kitchen. But she wasn't alone in this venture. She had friends by her side. She had Jack by her side.

Chapter Twenty Four



Pushing herself to sitting, she pushed the duvet off her and checked the time. It was only half-eleven. Everyone had left early, insisting Elsie and Ian needed a good night's sleep before their wedding day. She couldn't sleep, though. She should be feeling light, free, but the shadows of doubt had already begun tugging at the edges of her mind.

Switching on the bedside lamp, she leaned against the pillows and picked up her mobile. She'd had notifications from her email account, but also from Jack. She scrolled through to his message. He was just chatting, asking her how the preparations for the reception had gone. He'd been active only five minutes ago. Would he still be awake?

She messaged him quickly, *Are you still up? x*

Yes, still up. Do you fancy going for a walk? xxx

Yes. Meet you in five? x

Good plan. I'll walk down to meet you xxx

Standing up, she slipped into her jeans and pulled her jumper over her head before tiptoeing out onto the landing.

Downstairs, she fought her way through Diane's bedsheets tunnel and let herself out into the night air. With the door locked behind her, she perched on the window ledge and scrolled through her emails. Clicking them open one by one, she frowned. They were all from Melissa. All begging Evie to ring her back.

She checked her missed calls. She'd had nine! All from Melissa. Evie must have only been asleep for twenty minutes, if that. How had she missed all of these calls?

Scrolling through her phonebook, she found Melissa's number and pressed *Call*. She knew she'd still be awake, if there was one person who slept later than Evie herself, it was Melissa. 'Melissa, is everything okay?'

'Evie, ever since I got your email, I've been trying to get hold of you. Where the heck have you been?'

'I...'

'It doesn't matter. What are you thinking? You don't get the promotion, so you quit? Quit? The firm is your life! You've been there every step of the

way. I thought you understood why I had to make Steven partner. I explained.'

'I've quit because it's the right thing for me. I need a new challenge, an adventure.'

'Listen to yourself. Adventures? We're solicitors, we're meant to play it safe. We know what can happen if we don't. What are your plans? To try and get a job at one of our competitors? Just to spite me?'

'What? No, I'm moving down to Cornwall. I'm going to start up my own practice.' The phone line went quiet and Evie pulled it away from her ear to check she still had signal.

A hollow laugh pierced the silence.

'Melissa, why on earth are you laughing?'

'Oh, you're being serious?'

'Yes, of course, I'm being serious.'

'Well, it's a ridiculous idea. You wouldn't know where to start in building up your own practice. It's always been me who's dealt with the business side of things, and I can tell you something, it's not easy. If it was, you'd be partner now instead of Steven.'

'I can learn.'

'Learn? Do you really think there's a manual for opening up a law firm? I love you, Evie. You know I do. That's why I don't want to see you setting yourself up for failure.'

'I can do it. Thank you, Melissa, but I'm happy with my decision.' Leaning forward, she pinched the bridge of her nose.

'And what about your clients? You're risking their futures by upping and leaving like this.'

She frowned and looked at the cobbles beneath her. 'I tied up any loose ends with my clients before I came away. You know that.'

'I'm just really disappointed in you. I thought we had each others' backs. I'll give you until midday tomorrow. If you're not in the office by then, I very much doubt I can smooth things over with Steven for you. Have a serious think and we'll forget all about your resignation.'

'Melissa, I...' Too late. She was gone. Tucking her phone into her coat pocket, she stood up and walked towards the beach. Was she doing the right thing? Melissa was right. It wouldn't be easy. If it was, Melissa wouldn't have had to have Steven to bail her out. She could lose everything, her reputation, the money she'd invested in her apartment.

Walking across the sand towards the ocean, she paused and looked out across the water. The moon's reflection on the surface of the water rippled with each wave, distorting the reflection. That's what Jack had done. He'd distorted her reality. Suggested she could do something that perhaps she couldn't. He'd seen a confidence in her that she just didn't have. She wasn't made to be a business owner. She was a solicitor, just a solicitor.

'Hey.'

Evie turned and watched as Jack walked across the sand towards her. Suddenly, she didn't understand what she was doing anymore. Whether he'd done it on purpose or not, he'd made her believe she was someone she wasn't. He'd encouraged her to give up her job, a job she loved. And why? So she could move down here and save him from travelling to see her.

'Are you okay? You look as though you've been crying.' Stepping forward, he used the pads of his thumbs to wipe under her eyes.

Pushing him away, she wiped the sleeve of her coat over her face. 'I can't do this anymore. I need to go home.'

'What? I thought you were thinking of moving down here?' He rubbed the back of his neck.

'No, yes, I was. I even resigned from my job.'

'Oh wow, that's amazing news!' Grinning, Jack stepped closer.

Walking towards the water, she turned and looked at him. 'No, it's not because my boss rang me and made me realise it's not who I am. I can't start my own law firm.'

'Yes, you can...'

'She held up her palm, silencing him. 'No, I can't. Not everyone's like you. I've got my apartment in London. I've got my clients, my job. I can't just walk away from that.'

'I understand. That's not such a bad thing. London isn't on the other side of the world. We can still make it work.'

'No, Jack, there is no us. I need to focus. I need to be me again. I don't know who I am with you. You sell me dreams, and I need reality.' Turning, she ran back up the beach towards the bakery. It was all so clear now. She'd been caught up in this silly daydream, but it wasn't the way she was made, she wasn't brave enough. It wasn't her. And Jack, how did she even feel about him? Were her feelings about him just a distortion too? She'd coped all these years on her own. Maybe she was just better that way.

Chapter Twenty Five



She watched as the LED numbers flicked from 05:59 to 06:00 and flung the duvet off. She wiped her eyes dry with the bottom of her pyjama top. Padding quietly through to the bathroom, she splashed cold water over her face. She should have just got up and left earlier, gone straight away after she'd spoken to Jack.

She hadn't wanted to, though. Melissa was right. She needed to go back to the office, grovel to Steven and try to keep hold of her job. But something was still pulling her to the bay. And Jack.

She patted her face dry on one of Elsie's fluffy white towels. Yes, Jack had made her believe she was someone she wasn't, but was that such a bad thing? Yes, he'd encouraged her to leave her job, but it had only been because he had believed in her. It hadn't been his fault she didn't have the strength, the know-how to live up to his expectations. He'd had faith in her and she'd thrown it right back in his face.

Tiptoeing back into the bedroom, she closed the door quietly and sank onto the bed. Picking up her phone, she scrolled through to his messages and began reading them through. She'd been too harsh on him. He'd been prepared to travel, to have a long-distance relationship with her.

Firmly placing her mobile face-down on the bed, she shook her head. She needed to go back to London, back to her reality. This was just a holiday. Moving down here was just a pipedream and by believing in that pipedream, she may well lose everything she'd worked for in real life.

She couldn't be sentimental about Jack. She couldn't let him or the way she thought she felt about him to sway her, not again. She didn't have time to process it. Not at the moment. She just needed to travel back home.

Heading back to her room, she changed and shoved her belongings back into her holdall. Pulling her notebook back out, she scribbled a quick message to Elsie, explaining that she'd had to go back, wishing her a wonderful day.

Forcing herself to walk away, to walk out of the bakery, she threw her holdall onto the backseat of her car. She felt awful for letting Elsie down, for leaving like this, but it was for the best. She didn't have a choice.



SLOWING THE CAR TO a stop at the junction leading out of Penworth Bay, she looked in the rear-view mirror and sobbed. She'd been so close. So close to changing her life, so close to finding happiness with Jack, so close to being part of Elsie's found family.

With her hands gripping the steering wheel, she drove off. Away from the bay, away from her chance of a new life and, most importantly, away from the man who had begun to change her mind about love.

The piercing ringtone from her mobile rang through the car's speaker system. It was Melissa. 'Hello?'

'Evie. Have you decided what you're doing yet? I've got Steven all worked up.' Melissa's voice was curt. She was under pressure.

'Yes, I'm...' The car hit a pothole, the car veering off towards the grass verge. Pulling the steering wheel back, Evie steadied the car.

'You're what?'

'I've just hit a pothole. Hold on.'

'Tell her I haven't got all day.'

Evie could hear Steven's voice in the background. So that was why Melissa sounded so wound up. She pumped the accelerator as the car slowed. Changing gears, she automatically leaned forward, willing the car to gain speed again.

'Look, Evie, we need an answer.'

Blinking, she shook her head. She'd just hit a pothole, and she'd told her that, and yet Melissa was still trying to pressurise her.

'Evie?'

What was she doing? Why was she even contemplating going back? Her work would suffer, and the services she offered her clients would suffer under Steven's control, too. Her clients didn't deserve a second-rate service, and she didn't deserve to be spoken down to all the time. She was a good solicitor and Jack was right, she'd carried that firm. She could set up her own. 'The answer's no, Melissa. I'm not coming back.'

As the car slowed to a stop, Evie managed to cruise it towards the grass verge. Putting her hazard warning lights on, she climbed out of the car, walking around and checking for damage.

That was it then. A burst tyre. Leaning her hands on the side of the car, she took a deep breath. She'd made up her mind and there was only one person she wanted to call.

‘Evie?’ He sounded tired. His voice far away. Too far away.

‘Jack. I’m so sorry. Everything was too much, I just couldn’t think properly.’

‘I understand. I’m sorry. I was only trying to help you. I didn’t mean to make things worse.’

‘No, you were right. You believed in me more than I believed in myself. I want to come back to the bay. I don’t want to leave. I want to give it a go.’

‘Give what a go?’

‘All of it. Starting my own firm, living in the bay, you.’ She looked down at the deflated tyre. ‘If you’ll have me that is.’

‘Of course. Can I pop around to the bakery? See you quickly before the wedding?’

‘I’m not at the bakery.’

‘Oh.’ The disappointment in his voice was clear. ‘You’ve gone back to London already?’

‘Not quite.’ Evie stubbed the tyre with the toe of her trainer. ‘I’m stuck on the side of the road with a flat tyre.’

‘Have you rung the breakdown cover? Are you safe where you are?’

‘Not yet. I wanted to ring you first. I will do, though. And, yes, I’m safe. I’m a few metres up from where we first met.’ She glanced towards the spot Jack had crashed his car, the tyre tracks were still etched into the grass and the gap in the hedgerow was evidence enough something had happened there.

‘Give me ten minutes and I’ll be there.’

Looking down at her phone, Evie sank to the grass verge, pulling her knees up to her chest. What had she been thinking? She’d been about to let Melissa bully her into staying at the firm, working beneath Steven. She needed to take a leaf out of Jack’s book and believe in herself a bit more.

Chapter Twenty Six



Standing up from the sofa, Evie smoothed down the soft, dusky pink material of her bridesmaid dress.

‘Here she comes.’ Daisy held open the living room door as Elsie walked in.

‘You look beautiful.’ Evie grinned and carefully picked up the bridal bouquet, passing it to Elsie.

‘Thank you, love. You look beautiful, too. That pink really suits you.’ Taking the flowers, Elsie hugged Evie’s shoulders.

A loud beep sounded from outside the bakery.

‘That’ll be your wedding car.’ Daisy held her arm out, ready to link with Elsie’s. ‘Shall we?’

‘Yes, we shall.’ Looking around at the living room, Elsie brushed away a tear. ‘The next time I see this place, I’ll be married.’

‘That’s if we get there on time.’ Daisy laughed.

‘Right, yes, of course. I suppose we’d better get a wriggle on.’ Elsie smiled at Evie before linking arms with Daisy.

‘Elsie, I’m afraid we’re under strict instructions from Diane to cover your eyes as you walk through the bakery. She wants it to be a surprise when you walk in for the reception.’

‘Oh, only Diane.’ Elsie chuckled as she passed Evie her bouquet, covered her eyes with one hand and took Daisy’s in her other.

‘Are you ready? No peeking?’

‘No peeking.’

Evie followed Daisy and Elsie through the bakery and pulled open the bakery door, holding it open for them.

‘Can I open my eyes yet?’

‘One moment.’ Evie closed the door behind them. ‘Yep, you can open them now.’

Opening her eyes. Elsie blinked. ‘Is that my wedding car?’ She pointed to a pale blue classic MG.

‘It certainly is, ma’am. My name is Phillip and I’ll be your driver for the day.’ Phillip stepped forward and opened the door.

‘I’m sure I recognise this car.’ Walking across to the MG, Elsie ran her hand over the bonnet and looked at the driver. ‘Did this beauty happen to have a tiny chip on the bonnet, just about here?’

Phillip removed his flat cap and frowned. ‘Well, yes, it did. Several years ago, though.’

Elsie grinned. ‘I knew it. I knew I recognised her. I can’t believe Ian managed to find and book the exact same car.’

‘How do you know it had a chip?’ Daisy peered at the bonnet and ran her hand over the smooth, perfect metal.

‘Now that would be telling.’ Elsie chuckled. ‘No, I’m only teasing. Ian and I took Ollie and his sister, Helen, to a vintage car show when they were teenagers and your husband...’ Elsie looked at Daisy and raised her eyebrows. ‘Only started playing football with a stone, didn’t he? Well, this beauty became the victim of a bad aim.’

Phillip chuckled. ‘My dad owned her then. I remember that day. He came home and told us the story of a stone chipping the bonnet. He said he’d been offered a lifetime’s supply of pasties and cakes in addition to the repair being paid for.’

‘That’s right. I’d forgotten I’d given him free food.’ Elsie chuckled as she climbed into the car, patting the seat next to her as Daisy and Evie climbed in too. ‘I could get used to luxury like this, being driven around in a gorgeous MG like this.’ She ran her index finger gently over a peony petal in her bouquet. ‘How on earth did Ian manage to hire that exact same car?’

‘I have no idea.’ Daisy laughed. ‘You’ve given me some good ammunition for teasing Ollie, though.’

‘Indeed. He was so mortified when he realised what he’d done.’

‘Aw, maybe I won’t tease him then.’ Daisy rubbed her baby bump and grinned at Elsie. ‘You’re getting married!’

‘I know. I really didn’t think this day would ever come and it might not have if the old surf shop’s roof hadn’t collapsed.’

‘What happened?’ Evie frowned. What did a roof have to do with Elsie getting together with Ian?’

‘Daisy and Ollie bought the old surf shop by the seafront to refurbish into their restaurant. It was in a right state, wasn’t it? Had been left empty for years. Anyway, there was a big storm at New Year and Ian was inside.’ Elsie held her hand over her chest.

‘The roof came down and Ian was trapped inside.’ Daisy grimaced.

‘Yes, if it wasn’t for Scott and Olivia...’ Elsie shook her head.

‘What did they do?’ Evie glanced out of the window as they drove slowly up the hill and past the pub.

‘They only ran inside and rescued him.’ Elsie wiped fresh tears from her eyes.

‘And to think it took something like that for you both to be honest about how you felt about each other?’ Daisy shook her head.

‘Yes, I know.’ Elsie looked down at her engagement ring. ‘All those years...’ She shook her head. ‘But we’re together now and that’s all that matters. Besides, if our story can remind people to grab love where they can and to be honest with the person about how they feel, then those years won’t be so wasted.’

‘You were always great friends though, weren’t you?’

‘Absolutely. The best.’

‘Ooh, here we are.’ Daisy clapped her hands. ‘Are you ready to marry the love of your life?’

‘I was ready forty years ago.’ Elsie chuckled as she watched all the other bridesmaids rush towards the car ready to greet them.

‘Here we are, ladies.’ Phillip opened the car door and held his hand out to help them out.

‘Thank you, love.’

‘Thanks.’ Stepping outside, Evie looked towards the church and Jack, who was approaching them taking photographs. She grinned at him.

Lowering his camera, Jack paused. ‘Wow, you look stunning. You all do.’

‘Thank you, love. Is Ian inside yet?’ Elsie wafted her veil over her shoulders.

‘He’s been ready and waiting for the past hour.’ Chuckling, Jack walked backwards, snapping photos as they walked through the ornate archway into the churchyard.

‘Ooh, Elsie, you look fabulous!’ Running up to them, Freya hugged Elsie before holding her at arm’s length. ‘You really do.’

‘Nana Elsie! I love your pretty dress, your veil... and you have a crown!’ Pippa launched herself at Elsie, wrapping her arms around her with such force Elsie staggered back and steadied herself before hugging her back.

‘Oh, my darling Pippa. You look beautiful too.’

‘Thank you, Nana Elsie. Can I wear your crown later? Please? Please, can I? I’ll be super careful and won’t even run when it’s on my head.’ Pippa jumped up and down.

‘Of course you can, my darling. When we get back to the bakery for the reception, you can.’ Elsie touched her tiara. ‘I think it will suit you.’

‘Yay! Really?’ Pippa turned and glanced at her mum. ‘I told you she’d let me, didn’t I, Mummy?’

‘You did indeed.’ Teresa stepped forward and hugged Elsie. ‘Sorry, she’s been asking me if you’re going to be wearing a tiara, or a crown as she calls it, all week.’

Elsie chuckled. ‘That’s our Pippa.’

‘Elsie, you look amazing.’ Brooke grinned. ‘Come and put Ian out of his misery.’

‘Yes, yes. Let’s do this. Come on, Hudson and Pippa. Are you two going to hold my hands as we practised? And Rueben and Toby, loves, you know what to do?’ Elsie took Hudson’s hand and held her other one out for Pippa. ‘That’s it, Pippa, over here.’

Pippa skipped towards Elsie as Rueben and Toby, dressed in their smart light grey suits, stood slightly in front of them.

Evie stepped into position next to Freya as the church organ began to play the Wedding March and two of the ushers, Charlie and Scott, held open the doors to the church. As she began walking down the aisle behind Daisy and Wendy, she glanced behind at the sea of the dusky pink fabric of the bridesmaids’ dresses as Teresa and Molly walked behind them followed by Jessie and Olivia, Lauren and Diane, Paige and Carrie, Brooke and Nina, Heidi and Gemma and Jessie.

As they filed into the pews at the front of the church, Evie smiled at Ian, who dabbed a red and white checked handkerchief at his eyes before turning and facing down the aisle.

Looking back down the aisle, Evie grinned as Rueben and Toby began walking between the pews, gently throwing pale pink rose petals on the floor in front of them. She could see the look of love fill Ian’s face as Elsie walked towards him, her hands holding Hudson’s and Pippa’s.

As Elsie neared Ian, Teresa ushered Rueben, Toby, Hudson and Pippa towards her whilst Wendy stepped forward, ready to take Elsie’s bouquet for her. Evie could see Elsie and Ian’s eyes lock together, the world falling away as they came together to promise their love for one another.

Chapter Twenty Seven



The bakery was packed to the brim. The tables full and extra chairs lining the walls. Friends, family, and regular customers had all hurried from the church to the bakery, all eager to arrive at the reception venue before the happy couple, all wanting to share the magic of the day by greeting Elsie and Ian.

‘They’re here. Everyone, grab a glass of something bubbly.’ Diane clinked a spoon against her champagne glass, signalling everyone to get ready.

Standing up, Evie held her glass, watching as the bakery door swung open. A few seconds passed before Ian walked across the threshold, carrying Elsie in his arms.

‘To Elsie and Ian! Congratulations!’

A loud cheer rang through the bakery as Ian lowered Elsie to the floor and smoothed down her dress.

‘Oh, look. Look at this.’ Gripping her new husband’s hand, Elsie pointed to the candles surrounded by pale pink peonies on the tables, the white swathes of fabric covering the counters and enveloping the bakery in a magical, serene embrace, the colourful paper chains hanging from the ceilings created by the children and the lively bar decorated by Gavin.

‘And these, where on earth...?’ Ian shook his head as he indicated the numerous photographs tacked to the walls of himself and Elsie over the years.

‘We have our sources.’ Stepping forward, Connor laughed and indicated the fabric-covered wedding counter on which their wedding cake stood.

Covering her mouth with her hands, Elsie gasped. ‘Oh Wendy, this is just wonderful. Thank you so much.’ Walking across to Wendy, Elsie drew her in for a hug. ‘My beautiful, talented Wendy, it’s absolute perfection.’

‘Are you sure you like it?’ Wendy picked Hudson up, sitting him on her hip.

‘Like it? We love it.’ Ian hugged her before drawing away and ruffling Hudson’s hair. ‘Your mum’s a very talented lady, she is.’

‘It’s all wonderful. All of it. Thank you so much for all the time and effort you’ve put into transforming the bakery into such an amazing wonderland.’ Elsie looked around the room. ‘Thank you all of you for taking the time to share our special day with us.’

‘To Elsie and Ian!’ Raising his glass, Ollie looked around the room, prompting everyone to join in.

‘To Elsie and Ian.’

‘Wishing you the best for your future together.’

‘Congratulations!’

‘Happy wedding day, Nana Elsie and Grampy Ian.’ Pippa ran forward, her glass of orange juice clasped in one hand, the orange liquid sloshing precariously towards the rim.

Stepping forward, Evie took the glass, juice spilling across her hand seconds before Pippa threw her arms around her newly married found grandparents.

‘Phew, thank you.’ Teresa took the glass and passed a napkin to Evie. ‘Now that was a close call. Not that Elsie would have been in the least bit upset, but I’d have been mortified.’

Smiling, Evie dried the juice from her hands before wiping her eyes. Why was she even crying? This was a happy day. A day to celebrate. She glanced around the room. In the few short weeks she’d been staying in Penworth Bay, she’d got to know so many of the people here and the people she didn’t know by name, she recognised from the bakery or from the streets. Everyone had made her feel welcome. Welcome to the bay, in the local community, and to Elsie and Ian’s found bakery family.

She watched Jack mingling with the guests, taking natural photographs as Elsie and Ian greeted, thanked, and made time for each and every one of their guests. She’d made the right decision to stay. The right decision to take a chance on Jack, a chance of love. If she needed anymore proof that love did actually exist, she only had to look at the way Elsie and Ian held hands, the small glances between each other, the way Ian brushed Elsie’s hair from her eyes and the way Elsie brushed fluff from Ian’s suit jacket.

Epilogue



Evie opened the bakery door, ushering Jack inside before brushing the rainwater from his hair. ‘It’s a bit wet out there, isn’t it?’
‘Now, that’s an understatement.’ Chuckling, Jack gently cupped his hand behind her head, drawing her in for a kiss.

Closing her eyes, she could feel the cool of the rain as it dripped from his hair to hers. She didn’t care. She wrapped her arms beneath his open coat, drawing in the heat from his body and hugging his waist before stepping back and glancing around the bakery. The storm outside had kept the majority of their regulars away. Only the brave or those in need of a warm pastry or loaf of bread had made the journey. Brooke and Diane were now hugging mugs of coffee Teresa had made before disappearing back into the kitchen, whilst Wendy and Molly holed up in the wedding planning office talking with a new couple.

‘I hope Elsie and Ian are having better weather in the Cotswolds.’ Evie slipped her apron over her head. The last couple of days had felt strange without Elsie bustling about the bakery. ‘Saying that, I don’t think any amount of torrential downpours would have dampened Elsie’s excitement at honeymooning in the Cotswolds. Did you see her face when Ian told her he’d booked it?’

‘Yes.’ Jack grinned. ‘In fact, I got a fabulous shot of the moment. Even if I do say so myself.’

Laughing, Evie pecked him on the lips. ‘Always humble.’

‘That’s me.’ Jack chuckled.

‘One second and I’ll grab my coat. Thank you for coming with me today.’

‘No worries. You might want to open this before you get your coat, though.’ He pulled a bag from behind him.

‘What is it?’

‘A present.’ He grinned and passed it to her.

‘Really? Aw, thank you.’ Placing the bag on the closest table, Evie opened it and pulled out a thickly padded red coat. ‘Oh, wow, a new coat. Thanks.’

Running his fingers through his hair, Jack grinned. 'I just thought you might need one now you've decided to stay in the bay. It's waterproof rather than shower resistant, so it should actually keep you dry even in weather like this.'

'Jack, I don't know what to say.' Shaking her head, Evie blinked back tears. 'Actually, I do.'

'You do what?'

'I do know what to say.'

'Oh, yes?' He frowned.

Laying the coat on the table, she took Jack's hands in hers and looked him in the eye. What was it that Elsie had said in the car on the way to the church? Not to waste time, to tell the person you care for how you feel? Swallowing, she took a deep breath. 'I love you, Jack Timpson.'

'I love you too, Evie Phillips. I really do.'

Evie grinned. It felt right. Real. How could her entire perception of love have changed so dramatically in such a short space of time? She shook her head and stepped towards him, allowing herself to be drawn into a hug. She supposed it didn't really matter. The only thing that truly did was that it had, not how.

'As lovely as this is and as much as I want to stay like this forever, we really should be getting a move on if you want to get to the viewing on time.' Kissing her forehead, Jack picked up his coat and held it open as she shrugged into it.

'That's true.'

'Evie, don't forget this. It has all your questions written on the back.' Diane picked up a sheet of paper from behind the bakery and waved it in the air.

'Oh yes. Thank you.' Taking the paper, Evie looked down and traced her index finger over the photograph of the cottage, the perfect little home for her to rent. It even had a small breakfast bar overlooking a little herb garden out the back, the ideal place for her to sit and write the business plan for her new venture. Folding it carefully, she tucked it into the pocket of her new coat, linked arms with Jack and stepped out onto the cobbles and into the rain.



'IT'S DECIDED THEN?' Jack closed the little metal gate at the end of the front garden to the cottage.

‘Definitely. I can really see myself living there.’ Evie grinned. It had been everything the photos had promised and more. ‘Plus, the estate agent seemed to think I could move in as soon as next week if my references came through quickly.’

‘I still can’t believe you’re moving here.’ Turning, he gently pulled up Evie’s hood.

‘Me neither.’ Evie frowned and nodded towards a woman in the bus shelter opposite. ‘Do you think she’s okay? I’m pretty sure there’s not another bus for at least an hour. I think I’ll go and see if she wants to wait inside the bakery rather than out here.’

Jack looked across the road towards the bus shelter. ‘Good idea.’ Holding out his hand, he waited until she’d slipped her hand into his and led the way across the road.

‘Hi, are you okay? I think you might have a bit of a wait until the next bus. Did you want to come and wait in the bakery down the hill? It’s warm inside and I can get you a coffee?’

‘The bakery?’ The woman peered from beneath a hood.

‘Yes, that’s right. We serve drinks too.’

‘The Cornish Bay Bakery?’

‘That’s the one. Do you know it?’ Evie smiled.

‘No. I mean, I know of it.’ The woman chewed her bottom lip and picked up her rucksack, seemingly thinking about something. Sighing, she nodded. ‘I’m supposed to be volunteering there, but now I’m not so sure. I’m a few days early and...’

‘Oh right. Well, why don’t you come down and see it, get warm and then decide from there?’ Evie frowned. The woman looked as though she’d been crying.

Slowly, the woman nodded. ‘I suppose so.’

‘Great. I’m Evie, by the way, and this is Jack.’

‘Hi, I’m Gabby Burton.’ Standing up, the woman pulled her hood further down as she stepped out from the protective shield of the shelter.

‘I can take that for you, if you like?’ Jack held his hand out and nodded at the rucksack.

‘Oh, thank you.’



THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR reading. I hope you enjoyed reading *A Big Day at the Cornish Bakery* as much as I have enjoyed writing it. If so, I'd be so grateful if you could leave a review, please.



THERE ARE CURRENTLY thirteen books in ***The Cornish Bakery*** series:

Books in ***The Cornish Bakery*** series...

♥*Sunshine at the Cornish Bakery* <https://books2read.com/Sunshine-at-Cornish-Bakery>

♥*Christmas at the Cornish Bakery* <https://books2read.com/Christmas-at-Cornish-Bakery>

♥*New Year at the Cornish Bakery* <https://books2read.com/New-Year-at-Cornish-Bakery>

♥*A New Start at the Cornish Bakery* <https://books2read.com/A-New-Start-at-Cornish-Bakery>

♥*Family Ties at the Cornish Bakery* <https://books2read.com/Family-Ties-at-Cornish-Bakery>

♥*Celebrations at the Cornish Bakery*
<https://books2read.com/Celebrations-at-Cornish-Bakery>

♥*Returning to the Cornish Bakery* <https://books2read.com/Returning-to-Cornish-Bakery>

♥*Wedding Fever at the Cornish Bakery* <https://books2read.com/Wedding-Fever-at-Cornish-Bakery>

♥*Finding Love at the Cornish Bakery* <https://books2read.com/Finding-Love-at-Cornish-Bakery>

♥*Secrets & Surprises at the Cornish Bakery*
<https://books2read.com/Secrets-Surprises-Cornish-Bakery>

♥*Picnic Days at the Cornish Bakery* <https://books2read.com/Picnic-Days-at-Cornish-Bakery>

♥*Love in the Air at the Cornish Bakery* <https://books2read.com/Love-in-the-Air-at-Cornish-Bakery>

The Cornish Bakery series:

♥**Sunshine at the Cornish Bakery**

Come & join us in beautiful Penworth Bay, Cornwall

Volunteer at The Cornish Bay Bakery in exchange for a cosy room with views across the bay, new friends and the chance to explore the magical Cornish coast.

*In need of a change to your pace of life?
Want to escape the pressures of work?
Then contact Elsie today!*

When Daisy Green answers Elsie's advert, she's in need of a break. A break from her job, a break from her flatmate, a break from her bridezilla of a sister, Anne, and the chance to put as much distance between her and her cheating ex as possible.

Turning up in Penworth Bay, Daisy is quickly welcomed into the close-knit community with open arms and with the sun shining she's looking forward to being able to leave the drama of everyday life behind her.

When Elsie calls upon her to help Ollie in his quest to finalise his sister's wedding plans, Daisy reluctantly agrees.

Between choosing food for the wedding breakfast, deciding between roses and lilies and checking in on guests, a spark begins to grow between them. Or so Daisy hopes.

Just as she dares to believe in true love, her ex turns up and flips her world upside down.

Is Daisy brave enough to make a decision which will change her life forever? Will one fateful night lead to a rekindled romance or tragedy?

Packed full of sunshine, romance and friendship escape to Sunshine at *The Cornish Bakery* and travel to Cornwall to charming *Penworth Bay*...

<https://books2read.com/Sunshine-at-Cornish-Bakery>



♥Christmas at the Cornish Bakery

Come & join us in beautiful Penworth Bay, Cornwall

Volunteer at The Cornish Bay Bakery in exchange for a cosy room with views across the bay, new friends and the chance to explore the magical Cornish coast.

*In need of a change to your pace of life?
Want to escape the pressures of work?
Then contact Elsie today!*

In between jobs, homes and having given up on romance, can a chance meeting change Freya's mind about true love?

When Freya crashes Elsie's van straight into another car, the last thing on her mind is love. The victim of her mishap, sanctuary owner Chris Williams, doesn't forgive quickly and expects Freya to make amends.

As they spend more time together and Chris's Scrooge-like veneer starts to fade, can they help each other heal from past experiences? Or will she push him away?

When Chris's ex jeopardises the animal sanctuary he cares so much about, will Freya put aside her feelings and find a way to help?

With three little words, Chris makes her question everything she thought she knew about her future. Is she ready to take a chance on love, or will she allow past fears to determine her future?

Crammed full of snow, love, friendship and a sense of belonging, escape to *Christmas at the Cornish Bakery* and travel to Cornwall to charming Penworth Bay...

<https://books2read.com/Christmas-at-Cornish-Bakery>



♥ **New Year at the Cornish Bakery**

Come & join us in beautiful Penworth Bay, Cornwall

Volunteer at The Cornish Bay Bakery in exchange for a cosy room with views across the bay, new friends and the chance to explore the magical Cornish coast.

In need of a change to your pace of life?

Want to escape the pressures of work?

Then contact Elsie today!

Brimming with friendship, small town community and the lure of the ocean, join Olivia as she arrives in Penworth Bay...

Running from a painful past, Olivia craves some time for herself and hopes to find some solace at The Cornish Bay Bakery.

When her car breaks down and local mechanic, Scott, comes to rescue her, can this chance meeting begin to show Olivia that there is hope for the future?

Having pushed everyone she loves away since her break up with her ex, can Scott teach her to love again? Is she ready to immerse herself into the small town community she so needs?

As the New Year festivities begin, can Olivia use this as a new beginning?

<https://books2read.com/New-Year-at-Cornish-Bakery>



♥A New Start at the Cornish Bakery

Come & join us in beautiful Penworth Bay, Cornwall

Volunteer at The Cornish Bay Bakery in exchange for a cosy room with views across the bay, new friends and the chance to explore the magical Cornish coast.

In need of a change to your pace of life?

Want to escape the pressures of work?

Then contact Elsie today!

After having her confidence knocked, both in her private and professional life, Paige Walters needs a holiday. A holiday where she won't have time to think. Volunteering at The Cornish Bay Bakery seems to be the perfect solution.

When an emergency services open day sparks her into rethinking her career choices, will a new job be the only thing on her mind or will local firefighter, Owen, catch her eye too?

After a stark reminder of the life she'd hoped to leave behind, can Paige start to believe in herself again? Can she take the steps to build the future she deserves?

Can Owen convince her that she's worthy of his love? And can residents of Penworth Bay help her see this could be the start of a new life?

With an abundance of friendship, a large smattering of love and enough community spirit to warm your heart, follow Paige on her journey to Penworth Bay...

<https://books2read.com/A-New-Start-at-Cornish-Bakery>



♥ Family Ties at the Cornish Bakery

Come & join us in beautiful Penworth Bay, Cornwall

Volunteer at The Cornish Bay Bakery in exchange for a cosy room with views across the bay, new friends and the chance to explore the magical Cornish coast.

In need of a change to your pace of life?

Want to escape the pressures of work?

Then contact Elsie today!

When Lauren Burton turns up to The Cornish Bay Bakery there's more on her mind than surprising her sister. She hopes taking a break by the

scenic Cornish coast will give her the time and space to help her focus on her dreams for her future.

When she is quickly welcomed into the warm heart of the bakery family, she wonders what took her so long to visit. With the winter sun shining and the sand between her toes, she realises she's perfectly happy to be single and free of the drama of her past relationship.

Running into cute firefighter, Charlie, Lauren battles with her newfound determination to stay single and begins to allow herself to wonder if she could find happiness in a relationship after all.

Can their fledging romance cope when Lauren's ex gets back in touch? Will a secret Charlie holds jeopardise Lauren's hope of a happily ever after?

With a bucketful of small town kindness, the promise of romance and enough sea air to blow away the most stubborn of cobwebs, join Lauren as she arrives in the beautiful Penworth Bay...

<https://books2read.com/Family-Ties-at-Cornish-Bakery>



♥ Celebrations at the Cornish Bakery

Come & join us in beautiful Penworth Bay, Cornwall

Volunteer at The Cornish Bay Bakery in exchange for a cosy room with views across the bay, new friends and the chance to explore the magical Cornish coast.

In need of a change to your pace of life?

Want to escape the pressures of work?

Then contact Elsie today!

As soon as Molly Evans arrives in Penworth Bay, she is reminded that there's more to life than work. Volunteering at The Cornish Bay Bakery, she is soon welcomed into Elsie's close-knit bakery family, and with celebrations on the horizon, she is quickly drawn into the excitement of upcoming events.

When Jude, the man she once loved, walks into the bakery, his presence threatens to ruin her Cornish getaway entirely. As they work through painful memories and her true feelings towards him resurface, can she be honest to herself and to him?

With the sun shining through the clouds and the sand warm under her feet, she begins to question her goals in life and realises that this short break

away from the stresses of everyday living could be just the catalyst she needs to make changes for the better.

Can Molly and Jude put the past behind them and rekindle an old flame or will a stark reminder of why their previous relationship together came to an abrupt end squash their renewed romance before it really begins?

Return to idyllic Penworth Bay and revisit the charm and quirks of this friendly seaside community. Follow Molly as she arrives at The Cornish Bay Bakery and is surrounded by friendship, love and second chances...

<https://books2read.com/Celebrations-at-Cornish-Bakery>



♥ Returning to the Cornish Bakery

Come & join us in beautiful Penworth Bay, Cornwall

Volunteer at The Cornish Bay Bakery in exchange for a cosy room with views across the bay, new friends and the chance to explore the magical Cornish coast.

In need of a change to your pace of life?

Want to escape the pressures of work?

Then contact Elsie today!

Returning to Penworth Bay was always going to be difficult for Carrie Turner, but as soon as she steps inside *The Cornish Bay Bakery* and is greeted by Elsie, she is soon reminded of the warm and fuzzy feeling of her childhood.

After teaching abroad for years, it was time to face the inevitable. She could no longer avoid clearing out and selling her late mother's home; the cottage she grew up in.

The close-knit community of her past rallies around to support her, and soon she forgets she's ever been away and why she'd been so reluctant to return. With the sand between her toes and old friends around her, she falls back in love with the idyllic bay she grew up in.

Carrie is delighted to discover her childhood best friend, Danny, has made the bay his home and when he offers to help her, will memories of growing up together be all they share or will unexpected feelings emerge between them?

Step into the beautiful seaside community of Penworth Bay and, once again, be surrounded by friends and welcomed into Elsie's Bakery

family. Follow Carrie as she revisits her childhood home...

<https://books2read.com/Returning-to-Cornish-Bakery>



♥ **Wedding Fever at the Cornish Bakery**

Come & join us in beautiful Penworth Bay, Cornwall

Volunteer at The Cornish Bay Bakery in exchange for a cosy room with views across the bay, new friends and the chance to explore the magical Cornish coast.

In need of a change to your pace of life?

Want to escape the pressures of work?

Then contact Elsie today!

Running from the altar to Cornwall, the last thing Gemma Moreton wants to think about is weddings.

With The Cornish Bay Bakery in the midst of planning for Daisy and Ollie's big day, Penworth Bay is practically bursting with wedding fever and Gemma is left wondering if this will be the escape she needs.

When Gemma is introduced to Matt, a relationship is the last thing on her mind.

Will Penworth Bay work its magic and help Gemma's heart to heal from past hurts? Will she fall for mountain rescue hero, Matt, and finally learn she is worthy of true love?

Just as she is beginning to believe that she may have found her own happy-ever-after, Matt discovers that she left her ex at the altar and their fledgling romance is in jeopardy. Can he learn to trust her with his heart when he's still recovering from his own heartache?

Return to The Cornish Bay Bakery and, once again, immerse yourself in the warmth of Elsie's welcome. Feel the sun on your shoulders and the sand at your feet. Listen to the gentle waves from the ocean and celebrate Daisy's and Ollie's wedding with them...

<https://books2read.com/Wedding-Fever-at-Cornish-Bakery>



♥ **Finding Love at the Cornish Bakery**

Come & join us in beautiful Penworth Bay, Cornwall

Volunteer at The Cornish Bay Bakery in exchange for a cosy room

with views across the bay, new friends and the chance to explore the magical Cornish coast.

In need of a change to your pace of life?

Want to escape the pressures of work?

Then contact Elsie today!

Heidi Bateman is out of options. Her dream job in the Galapagos has ended and she finds herself with no job and nowhere to live.

When Gemma suggests Heidi volunteers at The Cornish Bay Bakery, she jumps at the opportunity to give herself some time to think and space to plan her future.

After a clumsy mishap in the cafe leaves her reeling, she reluctantly lets Liam, Penny's son, try to make things right.

As the days roll on, Heidi soon begins to feel valued and wanted, both by Elsie's extended bakery family and by Liam.

After spending her life pushing people away, can Heidi overcome her fear of the unknown?

Can she learn to trust or will her past experiences ruin her chances of being loved and loving others?

Crammed full of friendship, love and a sense of belonging, revisit Penworth Bay and enjoy the sun warming your face and the sand between your toes as Heidi volunteers at Elsie's bakery...

<https://books2read.com/Finding-Love-at-Cornish-Bakery>

♥Picnic Days at the Cornish Bakery

Come & join us in beautiful Penworth Bay, Cornwall

Volunteer at The Cornish Bay Bakery in exchange for a cosy room with views across the bay, new friends and the chance to explore the magical Cornish coast.

In need of a change to your pace of life?

Want to escape the pressures of work?

Then contact Elsie today!

Running from the her cancelled wedding and the betrayal of her sister, the last thing Jessie wants to think about is relationships, especially happy ones. So when she is faced with the prospect of having to plan other people's weddings, she decides to try to focus on the present, instead of the past.

Upon her arrival in idyllic Penworth Bay, she is immediately enveloped into Elsie's cosy bakery family and welcomed into the close-knit community

of the bay. Jessie becomes part of the team and quickly learns she can call the rest of the bakery family her true friends.

Kind, handsome Simon Groves comes to her rescue after a terrifying roadside incident and soon Jessie finds she no longer needs to pretend to be happy, because she is. Officer Groves shows her there is hope after her failed relationship and she soon begins falling in love.

Will the surprise arrival of her sister and her mum jeopardise Jessie's newfound happiness? Will she be able to continue to look to the future or will the past dramas pull her home again, away from her new life in the bay and away from her fledging romance with Officer Groves?

Can Jessie and Simon's relationship survive past trauma and challenges, or will they end up going their separate ways?

Step back into sunny Penworth Bay and enjoy the hustle and bustle of the height of the tourist season. Experience the thrill of the fair and the chill of the water around your ankles when you paddle in the sea.

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:

- ♥ Escape To... The Little Beach Cafe
- ♥ Escape To... Christmas at Corner Cottage
- ♥ Escape To... Berry Grove Bed & Breakfast
- ♥ Escape To... The Seaside Ice Cream Parlour
- ♥ Escape To... Bramble Patch Craft Shop
- ♥ Escape To... The Flower Shop on Serendipity Lane

Each book is a standalone story and can be read in any order. They are all available to read free in Kindle Unlimited, to buy as an ebook or to buy as a paperback.



♥Escape To... The Little Beach Cafe

Love, friendship and new beginnings... it's all waiting for Pippa Jenkins at *The Little Beach Cafe*...

When Pippa's aunt leaves her a cafe by the beach, it doesn't take her long to jump at the chance of a new start.

Waving goodbye to mounting debt, threatening bailiffs and never-ending shifts at a job she hates, Pippa and her young son, Joshua, arrive at their new cafe.

With a group of new friends by her side, can Pippa return her aunt's cafe to its former glory, as well as helping Josh settle into his new school and life?

As Pippa strives to make her new business a success, the arrival of her ex makes her question everything.

Will she succumb to his charms, or will Joe, the local plumber, be able to repair Pippa's heart? Can she see a future at The Little Beach Cafe, or will she return to her old life?

<https://books2read.com/The-Little-Beach-Cafe>



♥Escape To... Christmas at Corner Cottage

Cosy up with this heartwarming Christmas romance filled with hope, love and new opportunities...

When Chrissy Marsden moves her children and menagerie of pets into Corner Cottage in the small village of Moorfield, she hopes to put her divorce behind her and have the fresh start she's been longing for.

After a chance encounter at the school gates she finds herself being hired to alter a wedding dress and the opportunity to reignite her passion for sewing,

Will friendship and a chance to start her own dressmaking business be all she finds or will the bride's brother, Luke, offer something else entirely?

Just as Chrissy feels she is finally getting her life back on track, a surprise pregnancy and a lack of trust threatens her new relationship.

Can a Christmas Eve wedding bring Chrissy and Luke back together? Can she succeed in her new business venture? And will she be able to make the village her family home?

<https://books2read.com/Christmas-at-Corner-Cottage>



♥Escape To... Berry Grove Bed & Breakfast

Escape To... Berry Grove Bed & Breakfast promises love, second chances and new beginnings...

When Kim Reynolds learns how unhappy her daughter, Mia, is, she realises the perfect remedy is a completely fresh start.

Giving up the corporate job she's worked towards for her entire life, Kim is determined to make Berry Grove Bed & Breakfast a success but more

importantly, she's determined to support her daughter as she settles into her new life.

When Danny, Kim's childhood sweetheart, turns up, buried feelings and a complicated secret threatens to surface and jeopardise their newly discovered peaceful lifestyle.

Can the two people Kim loves most in the world understand and forgive her for keeping them apart?

<https://books2read.com/Berry-Grove-Bed-and-Breakfast>



♥Escape To... The Seaside Ice Cream Parlour

An opportunity of a lifetime, friendship and love... Escape To... The Seaside Ice Cream Parlour offers them all...

When Jenny has the chance to leave her days of sofa surfing behind and move to the beach to run her best friend, Helen's ice cream parlour, she jumps at the opportunity.

With no relevant experience, learning new skills to manage the ice cream parlour at the same time as juggling motherhood and trying to settle into their new home, certainly keeps her busy.

Welcomed into the local community, Jenny soon finds friendship and happiness. When Nick, Helen's ex, makes it impossible for Jenny to ignore him, ill feelings quickly turn to friendship, leaving them both wanting more.

Will Jenny succeed in making a new life for herself and her daughter, Grace, in the idyllic coastal town? Can Jenny put her feelings aside or will truths be told which will change her mind about her and Nick's future?

<https://books2read.com/The-Seaside-Ice-Cream-Parlour>



♥Escape To... Bramble Patch Craft Shop

Snuggle up with Escape To... Bramble Patch Craft Shop and escape into a world of love, new friends and the opportunity for Molly to follow her dreams....

When Molly Wilson and her two children, Lauren and Ellis, are forced to leave their old lives behind, will a small rundown shop in the middle of Payton-On-The-Water, a quiet village in the English countryside, offer the

fresh start they need and an opportunity for Molly to live her dream of opening and running Bramble Patch Craft Shop?

Between comforting and trying to settle her two homesick children into a new way of life, and dealings with the local law enforcement, Officer Duffey, can Molly make a success of her new business venture?

When a late night incident with a flat tyre highlights the fear that she has taken on too much and the reality that she is truly alone, will the arrival of Officer Duffey on the scene help or hinder her rescue?

Desperate to immerse herself and her family into village life, will the friends she makes by hosting regular Knit and Natter meetups be all she finds or will she discover there is more to Officer Duffey than his spiky exterior?

<https://books2read.com/Bramble-Patch-Craft-Shop>



♥ **Escape To... The Flower Shop on Serendipity Lane**

Take a stroll down Serendipity Lane, breath in the beautiful fragrances of the flowers from the florist, take in the beauty of the castle and see if you can spot the love in the air...

After years of juggling long hours at work, studying for her dream vocation and struggling for money it's finally time for change.

Following her dream to become a florist, Sadie Locke moves her two daughters, Lily and Poppy, into *The Flower Shop on Serendipity Lane*.

Discovering that her ex-husband's friend and divorce solicitor, Alex Marshal, works next door, Sadie feels her hopes of a fresh start quickly slipping away.

Pushed together at a mutual friend's wedding, will Sadie and Alex be able to rekindle a lost friendship or realise too much has come between them?

Will Sadie let the past define her future love life, or will she be able to give romance a chance, and will a lost dog Lily finds be the welcome distraction to help them all adapt to village life?

<https://books2read.com/The-Flower-Shop>