



A Special Delivery
at the
Cornish Bakery



Sarah Hope

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Escape To... The Cornish Bakery

Sarah Hope

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A SPECIAL DELIVERY AT THE CORNISH BAKERY

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Acknowledgements

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

For my children
Let's change our stars



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Chapter One



Roxie tapped her fingers against the steering wheel. What was the name of the village she was heading to? Petworth Bay? Penworth Cove? She shook her head. It was something like that.

Checking the rearview mirror, she pulled to the side of the road, putting on her hazard warning lights despite the fact she couldn't see any other cars, and leaned across to the passenger seat. Rummaging beneath the empty sandwich wrapper and crisp packet, she pulled out a notebook. That was it—Penworth Bay.

She squinted into the low evening sun before pulling away and making a quick left turn. There it was. She could see the sign in the distance. Almost there now. Almost time to begin her well-earned break. She grinned as she remembered her colleagues laughing at her for volunteering during her time off. Why would she want to spend her holidays on her own? She'd only start decorating or something just as stressful. No, this way, she was visiting a part of the country she'd always wanted to and as well as keeping herself busy, she might just come away having made a couple of friends, if she was lucky, anyway.

The tarmac turned to cobbles beneath the tyres as she passed the *Welcome to Penworth Bay* sign. This looked perfect—the hustle and bustle of her home town replaced by a small row of shops, the beach and the promise of warm weather, or at least warmer weather.

She slammed on her brakes as she spotted a red post-box to the side of the road and rolled her eyes as the mound of rubbish collecting on the passenger seat slid to the footwell. Perfect, just what she needed.

After pulling out a letter from the glove box, she smoothed it out before jumping out and posting it. There. Done. First class. Harvey should get that tomorrow, the next day at the most, and then he'd feel resolved of all guilt. She gave him her permission to move on, to be happy.

At the thought of him, she automatically pulled her cardigan sleeve over her wrist and got back in. Stretching her arms out in front of her, she flexed her fingers and shook her arms. A new area to explore, new people to get to know, the beautiful Penworth Bay—what more did she need from a break?

Turning the ignition back on, Roxie pumped the accelerator until the car reluctantly growled to a start.

‘Come on, Bruno. Almost there.’ Roxie tapped on the dashboard. She knew what was coming next. As she came to the small row of shops, Roxie gripped the steering wheel as a loud splutter escaped the exhaust, followed by a cloud of smoke. She slowed to a stop outside The Cornish Bay Bakery. She grinned. It looked as though it would be a busy place, judging by the fact it was double-fronted, anyway. It also looked as though they sold wedding cakes too.

Turning, she reached down to the footwell and picked up the rubbish again before dropping it onto the passenger seat as someone knocked on the window. Twisting around, she wound the window down and wafted the smoke away as it seeped inside. Had Bruno really backfired that much? Although it was a frequent occurrence, it rarely resulted in so much smoke. She looked at the woman crouching next to the window. ‘Is that me?’

‘I’m afraid so. Is everything okay?’

She’d have to get Bruno booked into a garage and just hope they didn’t tell her to give up on him. ‘Yes, I think so.’ The woman grinned. ‘If this rust heap has got me to the right place, then yes, it is.’

‘Where is it you’re heading?’ The woman smiled as a man came and stood next to her.

Roxie picked up her notebook again and flicked through until she came to the page with her scrawled handwriting on it. She was sure she was at the right place, but it couldn’t hurt to check—for all she knew there might be a chain of these bakeries all across Cornwall. ‘The Cornish Bay Bakery in Penworth Bay.’

‘You’re in the right place, then. This...’ The woman straightened her back and looked towards the bakery as two people ran outside, obviously in a rush somewhere. ‘Is everything okay?’ She called across to the man and woman as they pulled the door shut behind them.

‘Daisy thinks she’s gone into labour. She’s at the restaurant.’ The man, not pausing for a second, called over his shoulder.

‘Labour? Someone’s gone into labour. Now that’s something I might be able to help with, jump in.’ Roxie grinned. No rest for the wicked, as her grandma always said.

The woman looked from her to the man next to her and back again.

‘Don’t worry. That was nothing. She’s still got a few miles in her yet.’ Or at least she hoped he did. Roxie tapped the steering wheel.

‘Okay.’ Slipping into the back of the car, the woman budged along as the man joined her. ‘I’m Heather and this is Gus, by the way.’

‘Pleased to meet you. I’m Roxie.’ Starting the car, Roxie pulled along beside the couple running down the road. ‘Hey, do you want a lift?’

‘A lift.’ Pausing, the woman caught her breath.

‘Hey, Elsie. We’re in the back. Roxie is going to drive us up to the restaurant.’ Heather jumped out of the car and held the door open.

‘Right, yes. Yes, that would be amazing. Thank you.’ Elsie turned to the man, who had stopped slightly in front. ‘Ian, hop in. We’ve got a lift.’

As Ian slid into the backseat, Roxie pushed the rubbish from the passenger seat back onto the floor and leaned across, pushing the door open.

‘Thank you, love. I’m Elsie and this is Ian.’ Elise pulled her seatbelt on.

‘Hi, pleased to meet you. I’m Roxie.’ Releasing the handbrake, Roxie sped up down the cobbled road. ‘Just up here, is it?’

‘Yes, that’s right. Just keep going. Daisy has gone into labour with our honorary grandchild. She’s early.’ Elsie frowned as she looked out of the window.

‘How early is she?’ Roxie glanced across at Elsie.

‘Two weeks.’

‘Right. That’s not too early at all then. Have they rung for an ambulance?’

‘Yes, yes.’ Elsie tapped her knee. ‘They’ve not arrived yet, though.’

‘Not to worry. We’ll see how she’s doing and assess the situation.’ Roxie pulled into the car park.

‘And you’re a doctor or...?’

‘Sorry, I’m a midwife.’ Roxie laughed at herself. There she was, trying to calm Elsie, and she hadn’t even told her she was qualified to do so.

‘Oh, wow. And Roxie, isn’t it? You’re our new volunteer, aren’t you?’ Elsie unclipped her seatbelt. ‘Perfect timing.’

Roxie grabbed her mobile before jumping out of the car and following Elsie, Ian, Heather, and Gus into the restaurant. Pausing just inside the door, she glanced around. The restaurant was empty. Small vases of daffodils centred on the tables ready for the impending diners.

‘Roxie, love, this way.’ Elsie held open a door towards the back of the restaurant and waved her through.

Jogging the few metres to the door, Roxie stepped through. A woman, presumably Daisy, stood leaning against a desk, a man rubbing the small of her back.

‘Oh, Daisy, love. Are you okay?’ Rushing forward, Elsie rubbed the man’s shoulder before kissing Daisy on the top of her head. ‘Ollie, how long did the ambulance say they’d be?’

‘Twenty minutes. But it’s already been nineteen and they’re still not here.’ Ollie checked his watch before looking towards the door.

‘Hey, Daisy. I’m Roxie. I’m going to be volunteering at Elsie’s bakery, but I’m a midwife. Do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?’ Stepping forward, Roxie laid her hand on Daisy’s shoulder, her voice authoritative and calm.

‘A midwife?’ Daisy looked up at her before scrunching her face in pain.

Nodding, Roxie grinned. That was exactly what she needed—a contraction—she’d be able to see how long apart they were now. Ah, two minutes. She looked back at Daisy as pain flashed across her face again. ‘They’re pretty intense, right?’

‘They seem to have built up to this really quickly.’ Ollie ran his fingers through his hair. ‘I wasn’t sure whether to drive to the hospital or ring for an ambulance, so I rang because she’s in so much pain. Now I wish I’d just taken her. It would have been quicker.’

‘Don’t worry, we’ve got time.’ Roxie looked at Ollie. ‘Ring again and see how long it’s going to be.’

‘Right. Yes.’ Nodding, Ollie pulled his mobile from his pocket.

‘While Ollie’s busy doing that, we’re going to do some breathing. Do you remember the techniques they taught you at antenatal classes?’ Roxie focused on Daisy as Elsie held Daisy’s hands, breathing with her.

‘They’re going to be another half hour.’ Ollie’s face was pale as he shoved his mobile back into his pocket.

‘That’s decided then. Change of plan, Daisy. I’m going to drive you.’

Chapter Two



Roxie pulled the handbrake up and glanced back at Heather. ‘Are you okay?’ They’d dropped Gus off at home on the way back and Elsie and Ian had stayed at the hospital pacing the waiting room.

Heather nodded as she unclicked her seatbelt. ‘Just worried about Daisy and the baby.’

‘They’ll be fine. They’re in the best hands now.’ Roxie smiled.

‘Yes, you’re right.’ Slapping her knees, Heather opened the door. ‘I’ll give you a tour of the bakery if you like? Elsie would have but...’

‘That’ll be lovely. Thank you.’ Roxie waited until Heather had stepped out before grabbing her suitcase from the boot and locking the car. Good old Bruno. He may be more than a tad rusty, but he’d never let her down.

‘Have you worked at a bakery before?’ Pocketing the keys, Heather pushed open the bakery door.

‘Nope, never. I’ve worked in retail, though, so I’m hoping that will help.’ Stepping through the door, Roxie glanced at a counter to the right where a collection of exquisitely decorated wedding cakes sat proudly behind the glass. ‘I worked at my aunt’s wedding boutique every weekend whilst at uni, though.’

‘Really?’ Heather grinned. ‘That experience might just come in handy then. Wendy and Molly work on the wedding planning side of the business, but I’m sure they’d be glad of any extra help.’

‘Wedding planning? Wow, is it a specialist bakery just for weddings or something?’ Walking across to the wedding counter, she ran her fingers across the glass. The cakes really were stunning.

‘Nope. It’s a normal bakery.’ Heather pointed towards the opposite side of the large shop.

‘Ah...’ Slapping her forehead, Roxie laughed as she weaved her way through a collection of tables and chairs towards a large counter lining the opposite wall. Behind the glass screen of the counter, empty trays were lined up in rows, presumably awaiting freshly baked goods for tomorrow’s opening. Turning back around, she took in the large room, the two counters

opposite each other and the tables and chairs arranged between. ‘It’s huge, isn’t it?’

Heather laughed. ‘Yes. I remember turning up here to volunteer and assuming I’d be working in a small seaside bakery, not this.’

‘You’re a volunteer here too?’

‘Nope, not anymore. At the end of my time volunteering here, I decided to move down here.’ Heather fiddled with her necklace.

‘Oh wow. That must have been a huge decision.’

‘Yes, and no. Gus and I met while I was volunteering. He was on a work placement here, which came to an end, and staying in the bay seemed like such a natural decision.’ Heather grinned.

‘That’s lovely.’ Roxie smiled. After seeing them together, she’d assumed they’d been together for years, not weeks or months or the short time Heather had volunteered here.

‘Anyway, as you can see in here, we’ve got the bakery counter and the wedding counter.’ Heather indicated the counter opposite. ‘And behind there is Molly and Wendy’s office where they plan the weddings. This area in the middle is where Teresa serves cakes and coffee. And through here,’ Heather pushed open a door at the back of the bakery. ‘Is the kitchen.’

Slipping through the doorway, Roxie paused and looked around. The kitchen was huge too, running the width of the bakery, but it was how modern it was that surprised Roxie. All stainless steel and gleaming. ‘I’d been imagining I’d be working at a small bakery with an equally small and quaint kitchen, but this...’

‘It’s incredible, isn’t it? Elsie had it put in when she expanded the business a few years ago, apparently. She delivers to local cafes and businesses as well as selling in the bakery, so she needed a bigger kitchen. And then, of course, with the wedding cakes too...’

Roxie nodded. This was going to be great. She’d been looking forward to working in a small seaside bakery and getting to know people, but in a place like this, she imagined there’d be a fair few staff members as well as more customers. She grinned. Certainly no time to get bored. ‘How many people work here?’

‘Umm, so there’s obviously Elsie, and then Teresa, who works at the coffee and cake counter but also does the early morning baking with Elsie. Then there’s Wendy and Molly who focus on the wedding planning side of

the business and then Diane and Brooke who work behind the bakery counter.’ Heather ticked the people off her fingers.

‘Great.’ Roxie grinned. ‘And I’m guessing everyone must be nice, or at least tolerable, being as you’ve chosen to stay in the bay?’

‘Ha-ha, yes. Everyone’s really lovely. They’re like family.’

Roxie nodded. It sounded as though this place would be just what she’d been hoping when she’d booked it. Being busy and surrounded by people was just the sort of holiday she craved. Forget the ‘lounging-by-the-pool breaks’ or the ‘cooped-up-in-a-cottage-in-the-middle-of-nowhere retreats’. No, she wanted the buzz and bustle of a thriving business.

‘Do you want to see upstairs? I can show you your room if you like?’ Heather led the way back through to the bakery before indicating a door behind the long bakery counter. ‘I feel really rude, but I’m going to have to get going. I promised to help Gabby, another volunteer who’s decided to stay, with something. Do want to come too?’

Roxie yawned. She normally would have jumped at the chance, but after the long drive, her bed was calling her. ‘I’d love to, but I’m absolutely shattered, so I’ll stay here if that’s okay?’

‘Yes, of course. I’ll show you the flat and your room.’



ROXIE LAID HER BOOK open on her stomach and squashed the pillow down a bit more before looking up at the ceiling. The bed was so comfortable. Ridiculously so. She closed her eyes. In fact, maybe Elsie didn’t want anyone to help in the bakery after all. Not judging by how comfy it was, anyway.

She grinned. With the window ajar, she could hear the lapping of the waves down on the beach opposite. Every so often a late-night dog walker would call across to their dog, keeping their voice low as it carried on the wind. She could definitely see how this place could lure people into staying. And that was before she’d even really gotten to know anyone. It was strange, though, that both Heather and Gabby had stayed. Two volunteers from the same place had decided to up sticks and move their lives down here.

Shrugging, she closed her eyes. She guessed the majority of people who volunteered over going on holiday with friends or family probably had a reason to escape their hometown in the first place.

Tucking her hands behind her head on the pillow, she clenched her jaw, resisting the urge to pull her pyjama top down to her wrists. It was silly. No one was with her. Heck, she had the entire flat and bakery to herself. She didn't have to hide anything from anyone. Taking a deep breath in, she counted as she exhaled, focusing on her breathing rather than the building anxiety inside her. No one was about, and she was beyond certain that Elsie or Ian wouldn't just barge in. No, she was fine.

Chapter Three



Opening her eyes, Roxie perched herself up on her elbows and listened. Someone else was up and about, although with the room still bathed in only weak moonlight, it must still be before sunrise. She checked the small clock on the bedside table. 4:34am.

Throwing back the duvet, she stretched before pulling yesterday's cardigan on over her pyjamas. Elsie and Ian must be back from the hospital.

As she walked down the stairs, she traced her fingers across the brightly coloured parrots on the wallpaper, the enquiring expressions on their little faces enough to raise a smile, however early. Not that she needed cheering up. Not today. She had four weeks of living near the beach and getting to know new people ahead of her. Besides, she'd always been a morning person.

Pushing open the door at the bottom of the stairs, she walked into the empty bakery. Elsie and Ian must be in the kitchen. She could hear a quiet humming through the door, punctuated every now and again by chatter and laughter. She recognised Elsie's voice, but the other person wasn't Ian. It was another woman's voice.

She tapped on the door before pushing it open and stepping inside. Elsie was standing at the large stainless-steel table in the middle of the room while another woman carried trays towards the ovens at the back of the room. The smell of freshly baked bread filled the room as Roxie's stomach growled in response.

'Roxie!' Throwing the dough she'd been kneading into a bowl in front of her, Elsie turned and called over her shoulder. 'Teresa, here she is! The hero who helped us yesterday.'

Straightening her back after sliding the trays into the oven, Teresa looked across and grinned. 'Roxie, morning. So lovely to meet you. Elsie's told me all about how you saved the day yesterday by getting Daisy and Ollie to the hospital on time.'

'It was nothing.' Roxie shrugged and raked her fingers through her hair. 'How is Daisy? Any news on her baby yet?'

'Yes, yes. She had a beautiful little girl. Look.' Wiping her hands down the front of her apron, Elsie pulled her mobile out of her pocket and held it up

to Roxie, a photo of Daisy cradling a small baby with Ollie perching on the bed next to them filled the screen, their faces full of love, relief and excitement. 'Baby Bonnie. And she's just that, isn't she? Bonnie.'

Taking the phone off her, Roxie grinned as she looked at the photo. 'Oh, she's gorgeous.'

'Isn't she just?' Elsie held her hand over her heart as she took the phone back. 'Thank you so much for all you did yesterday.'

'You've already thanked me.' Roxie shrugged. 'Not that I really did anything, anyway.'

After placing the phone back in her apron pocket, Elsie laid her hand on Roxie's forearm. 'Oh, you did more than you know, love. Knowing we had a trained midwife with us on the way to the hospital kept us all calm.'

'In that case, it was my pleasure.' Roxie grinned. 'I'm glad I could help.'

Elsie glanced towards the oven as the timer beeped. 'You go back to bed now, love. Have a nice lie-in. You don't need to be up this early, not on your first day here.'

'Oh no, I'm happy getting up early. I love the mornings.'

'You're like Teresa in that way, then. Isn't that right, Teresa?'

'Oh yes. I live for my early morning coffees, sitting in the living room, a snatched moment of silence.' Teresa looked up from the pastry she was rolling and laughed. 'It's the only time of the day I can see the carpet. As soon as the kids wake up, Lego, Barbies and all sorts get spilt across the floor, patiently waiting for me to get home in the evening to put them back for the all of five minutes they'll stay there.'

'You have kids?'

'Oh yes, three little rascals.' Teresa shook her head.

'Aw, they're lovely.' Elsie smiled.

'Oh, they are. Wild, but lovely.' Teresa laughed and pulled a brightly coloured pasta necklace from beneath the neckline of her top. 'My youngest, Pippa, made this at school last week and woke up before I left this morning to make sure I was wearing it.'

'Ouch! She really woke up before you came?' Elsie whistled.

'Yep. Half-past three this morning, to be exact. Gavin, my partner,' Teresa looked over at Roxie. 'Wasn't best pleased when I woke him up to warn him she was sitting in the kitchen waiting for her breakfast.'

Elsie chuckled. 'I bet he wasn't. Oh dear, her teachers are going to have fun with her today then.'

‘Oh yes.’ Nodding, Teresa shrugged as she tucked the pastry into pie dishes.

‘Aw, she sounds a little character.’ Roxie grinned. ‘I’d have probably done the same when I was little.’

‘Ha-ha, me too. That’s why I can’t get too cross with her.’ Teresa laughed.

‘I’ll go and shower and come and help.’

‘Only if you’re sure, love. I don’t expect any of our volunteers to join in with the baking this early in the morning.’ Elsie smiled.

‘I’m sure. I’d like to.’



‘WOW, I HEARD YOU WERE totally amazing yesterday! What a way to introduce yourself! I’m Diane, by the way.’ Diane pushed the front door to the bakery closed behind her before rushing across to the counter where Roxie was standing.

‘Hi, it was nothing.’ Roxie slid a tray brimming with warm cookies under the counter.

‘Nothing? I’ve had Heather and Daisy herself messaging me singing your praises. Lovely to meet you.’ Diane shrugged out of her coat before pulling an apron over her head.

Roxie shrugged. ‘I was just doing my job.’

‘You weren’t at work. You went above and beyond yesterday.’

‘Ha-ha, you can take the midwife out of the hospital, but you can’t take the hospital out of the midwife. Umm, actually ignore that. It doesn’t work.’ Roxie laughed. ‘Before the bakery opens, I should warn you I’ve never worked in a bakery before, so I’m likely to be dropping doughnuts and cakes everywhere.’

‘Aw, you’ll be fine. Just take your time. Our regulars are super lovely and the tourists or people passing through are too, so no one’s going to mind.’ Diane began emptying small bags of change into the till. ‘Brooke will be here in a few minutes too, so there’ll be three of us behind the counter.’

‘If not, I’ll give everyone something to laugh about, anyway.’ Roxie grinned.

‘That’s what I always think. People don’t mind you messing up, just don’t worry about it.’ Diane nodded towards the door. ‘Here’s Brooke, Wendy and Molly.’

Roxie held the bakery door open as three women filed through.

‘Thank you. You must be Roxie. I’m Brooke. I’ve heard all about how much you helped Daisy and Ollie yesterday.’ Brooke shrugged out of her coat before pulling Roxie in for a hug. ‘I know you calmed Elsie and Ian down, for one thing.’

‘Hey, Roxie. I’m Wendy. Yes, Elsie didn’t stop talking about you when she was keeping us all informed of what was going on with Daisy and baby Bonnie.’ Wendy grinned.

‘Aw, I love that name. So cute. I’m Molly, by the way.’ Molly drew Roxie in for a quick hug. ‘It’s great to meet you after hearing so much about you.’

‘Oh, I really didn’t do anything. I basically just drove them to the hospital.’ Roxie smiled. ‘I’m just glad Bruno didn’t let me down.’

‘Bruno? Who’s Bruno?’ Wendy looked around the bakery.

‘My car. Bruno is my much loved but very rusty car.’ Roxie laughed.

‘Morning, everyone.’ Elsie let the kitchen door swing shut behind her as she carried two trays laden with cupcakes towards the counter. ‘I see you’ve all met Roxie.’

‘Hi, Elsie. How’s Daisy this morning? Have you heard from her?’ Wendy placed her bag on the counter. ‘I showed Hudson the photo you sent of the three of them, and I don’t think he quite understood. When I dropped him off at his childminder’s house, he kept pointing to his tummy and saying ‘Baby’.’

Elsie chuckled. ‘Oh, bless him. I can’t wait to see how he reacts when he sees little Bonnie.’

‘Me too.’ Picking up her bag, Wendy looked at Molly and frowned. ‘We’ve got a meeting with the Beatons first thing, haven’t we?’

‘Oh, yes. The lovely Beatons.’ Molly rolled her eyes. ‘Although, to be fair to them, they’re a lovely couple. It’s the mum that’s horrendous.’

‘What’s this?’ Daisy balled up the cloth she’d been wiping the counter with and raised an eyebrow.

‘Wayne and Shona Beaton, or that’s what they’ll both be called when they get married. Their wedding is in two weeks at The Fern Hotel, and you know how lovely The Fern is, right? Well, it’s not good enough for Shona’s mum. She wants everything to be changed. Right down to the soap that will be in the restrooms.’ Wendy twisted her hair around her finger.

‘But The Fern is gorgeous.’ Diane shook her head.

‘Yep, you try telling that to Shona’s mum.’ Molly shoved her hands in her pockets. ‘I feel for Shona, though. You can almost imagine her counting the minutes between complaints, can’t you?’

‘Yep. I just hope she doesn’t end up spoiling Shona and Wayne’s big day.’ Wendy picked up her bag and made her way towards the office behind the wedding counter, Molly by her side.

Roxie whistled under her breath. ‘I don’t envy them.’

‘Me neither. You just can’t please some people.’ Tutting, Diane walked across to the bakery door and turned the sign from Closed to Open. ‘Are you ready to serve your first customer?’

‘Absolutely!’ Roxie rushed behind the counter and picked up the cake tongs.

Chapter Four



‘Thank you. Have a lovely afternoon.’ Roxie passed a paper bag bulging with freshly baked rolls to the customer in front of her before looking down the end of the counter as Diane squealed.

‘Aw, Teresa, you’re a lifesaver.’ Diane picked up a mug from the tray as Teresa lowered it to the counter.

‘Here you go, Brooke. Roxie, I wasn’t sure what you drank, so I made a latte, but I can grab something different if you like?’ Teresa held out two mugs.

‘A latte is great, thanks. I’ll drink anything.’ Taking the mug, Roxie inhaled the aroma of milky coffee before taking a long sip. This was perfect. Just what she needed.

‘How has it been?’ Teresa nodded towards the counter.

‘Great. I can’t believe how busy it gets. I feel as though I must have served the entire community of Penworth Bay already.’ Roxie laughed.

‘Haha, I know how you feel.’ Diane gulped down her coffee. ‘We have a lot of people passing through as well as some who make the trip on their lunch breaks to grab their lunch and spend a few minutes soaking in the sea air.’

‘I can understand why. It looks gorgeous out there.’ Looking out of the window, Roxie wrapped her hands around the mug. The sun was shining and there was a warmth in the air that promised Spring had definitely arrived.

‘Have you sorted childcare for Wednesday night, Teresa?’ Brooke took her mug.

‘Yes, Gavin doesn’t have to do overtime now so he can have them as usual.’ Teresa grinned.

‘That’s a relief. I don’t think I’ve ever known you to miss a pub quiz night.’ Diane placed her mug back on the tray. ‘You’ll come, won’t you, Roxie? The local pub has a quiz on Wednesday evening and it’s kind of a bakery family tradition to go along.’

‘Ooh yes, come. Our team is actually on a bit of a winning streak at the moment, too.’ Brooke smiled.

‘Yes.’ Teresa nodded. ‘If you’d come a few months ago, you’d have likely been hanging your head in shame the number of times we lost.’

‘Oh yes, I remember those times. The pub landlord, Gerald, actually gave us free drinks on one occasion because he felt sorry for us as we always lost.’

‘Haha, I’m sure you weren’t that bad. What changed?’ Roxie took another sip of her latte.

‘The team grew, that’s all. With every past volunteer who made the bay their home, our team got stronger.’ Diane grinned.

‘Heather said that she and someone called Gabby decided to stay on here.’ Roxie placed her now-empty mug back on the tray.

‘Yes, and Daisy, Olivia, Freya...’ Diane began ticking the names off her fingers.

‘Daisy volunteered here too?’

‘That’s right. She volunteered here, met Ollie and moved down here.’

Roxie raised her eyebrows. ‘How come...’ She paused as the office door opposite opened and Wendy rushed out.

‘Is everything okay, Wendy?’ Teresa frowned.

‘No, Hudson’s not well and his childminder has found a couple of spots on his belly.’ Wendy grimaced.

‘Aw, no. Chicken pox?’ Teresa sighed.

‘She thinks so. He’s been really grumpy the last couple of days but I just put it down to him not sleeping well.’ Wendy shrugged. ‘Obviously, it wasn’t.’

‘You weren’t to know. Toby was the first one to get them out of my three, and I remember sending him to school as usual, assuming that the spots were some form of heat rash or something. I felt so guilty when the school rang and told me he had chicken pox, but I hadn’t realised.’ Teresa shrugged.

‘These things happen.’

‘Yes, you’re right.’ Wendy nodded. ‘I’ll just go and tell Elsie I’m heading home.’

‘Yes, and then curl up on the sofa with him and watch a film or something. Take it easy.’ Teresa laid her hand on Wendy’s forearm.



‘DO YOU NEED THESE EMPTY trays in the kitchen for the morning?’ Looking at Elsie, Roxie pointed to the empty trays beneath the counter.

‘Yes, please, love. Could you pop them in the dishwasher?’ Elsie turned the door sign to Closed. ‘Ooh, look who’s here!’

‘Who is it?’ Diane rushed towards the door and peered out of the glass. ‘Daisy and Ollie. Ooh, they’ve brought little Bonnie to meet us!’

‘No way! Aw, I get to meet my little cousin!’ Brooke pulled her mobile from her pocket, dropping it in her excitement before picking it up again and walking a couple of feet away. ‘I need to ring Nina. She’ll be so excited!’

‘Cousin?’ Roxie looked from Brooke to Daisy and Ollie’s car as it pulled up in front of the bakery.

‘Yes. Kind of. Brooke is Ian’s granddaughter and Nina is Brooke’s mum’s biological mum’s granddaughter, so is Brooke’s cousin.’ Diane grimaced. ‘Have I got that right, Elsie?’

Elsie nodded. ‘In a roundabout way, yes.’

‘Oh, okay. So Brooke’s mum was adopted, and she was Ian’s daughter and Nina is Brooke’s biological cousin.’ Roxie nodded. ‘And Ollie is Ian’s son?’

‘No.’ Diane smiled. ‘Ian brought Ollie and his sister Helen up after his parents passed away, so he’s...’

‘An honorary son.’ Grinning, Elsie pulled the bakery door open as Daisy and Ollie walked slowly towards them, carrying a car seat between them. ‘Oh, little Bonnie. Well done, loves.’

Daisy smiled as Elsie hugged her and Ollie in turn before taking the car seat.

‘Come on, you two. Come and sit down.’ Elsie placed the car seat on a table before unstrapping Bonnie, wrapping her in a baby pink blanket and cradling the tiny bundle. ‘She’s beautiful.’

‘Aw, she sure is.’ Teresa gently stroked Bonnie’s head before pulling a chair out for Daisy. ‘I’ll get some coffee.’

‘Thank you so much for bringing her around to meet us all.’ Gently rubbing Bonnie’s back, Elsie whispered over her head. ‘It’s just such a shame Ian’s not here.’

‘He’s on his way. Ollie rang him when we left the hospital.’ Daisy sat back in the chair and looked across at Roxie as she stood behind her. ‘Roxie, hi. Thank you so much for yesterday. I’m not sure if I thanked you.’ Daisy pulled out the chair next to her and indicated for Roxie to sit down.

‘Oh, you did. A few times.’ Grinning, she slipped into the chair. ‘You all did. Congratulations on Bonnie. She’s beautiful.’

‘Thank you. I can hardly believe I’m a mum now.’ Daisy shook her head. ‘I bet you hear that a lot from first-time parents?’

‘Haha, yes.’

‘Here’s Ian now. And Nina. Can you let them in please, Brooke, love?’ Elsie lowered her nose to the white hat covering Bonnie’s head. ‘She still smells like newborn baby, even through the hat.’

‘That’s what Ollie keeps saying.’ Grinning, Daisy put her hand on her shoulder as Ollie stepped forward and held it.

‘You must be shattered, love.’ Elsie looked at Daisy before turning to Ollie. ‘You both must be.’

‘We are.’ Daisy yawned.

‘Well, don’t stay for long then.’

‘We won’t, but we couldn’t wait for everyone to meet her.’ Daisy grinned as Ollie massaged her shoulders. ‘Could we?’

‘Nope, we couldn’t. But don’t worry Elsie, I’ll be looking after the both of them for the next few weeks.’

‘You’ve got time off from the restaurant?’ Elsie turned and looked at Ollie.

‘Yep. Connor and Jessie are taking the load.’

‘Oh, good.’

‘Oh, Daisy, Ollie, she’s gorgeous.’ A woman walked in with Ian and beelined for baby Bonnie.

‘Thanks. Nina, this is Roxie.’ Daisy waved her hand between Roxie and Nina.

‘Oh, Roxie. Great to meet you. I’ve heard all about how much you’ve done for Daisy and Ollie.’ Nina smiled at Roxie.

‘Lovely to meet you too.’ Roxie dismissed the thanks with a wave of her hand before looking around the small group. The way everyone had gathered to meet baby Bonnie and congratulate Daisy and Ollie reminded her of the maternity unit she worked at, close-knit and caring. One big family, really.

Chapter Five



‘And you’re definitely, one-hundred percent sure you don’t mind working on the weddings?’ Molly chewed her bottom lip.

‘Absolutely not. It’ll be fun.’ Roxie grinned as she followed Molly across the bakery and into the small office behind the wedding counter. What could be better than helping a happy couple plan their big day? Decorations, cakes, all things sparkly—yes, it’d be great fun.

‘Fun? Umm, I’m not sure if you’ll be saying that after our meeting at The Fern Hotel tomorrow.’ Molly grimaced as she slumped into a chair behind the desk, indicating to Roxie to take the other one.

‘Oh, the Beatons, right? You’ve got another meeting with them?’ Sitting down, Roxie adjusted the height of the office swivel chair. Umm, maybe she’d been a little enthusiastic. How difficult could the mum-in-law be?

‘Unfortunately, yes. Over at the hotel this time. Shona’s mum wants to make sure all the adjustments she’s insisted on are being implemented.’

‘Ah, can I change my mind?’ Laughing, Roxie began standing up.

‘Oi! Don’t do that to me. I beg you!’ Grinning, Molly shook her head.

‘Haha, I won’t. It’ll be fine.’ Roxie crossed her fingers and held them in the air. ‘Do you think Wendy will be back in time for the wedding?’

‘I don’t know. I guess it depends on when little Hudson stops being contagious and can go back to his childminders. I’m guessing she will.’ Molly shrugged.

Pulling her chair forward, Roxie crossed her legs and looked down at the open notebook in front of her. A list of things to do was scrawled under the title Shona & Wayne. Bar a few items, most were ticked off. ‘Is this what’s left to do?’

‘Yep. What’s left?’

Roxie slid the notebook across the desk so it lay open between them. ‘Ribbon to match tablecloths, dried flower petals and cake.’

Molly nodded. ‘Okay, well, Wendy should be back in time to make the cake, at least. Hopefully, anyway. If not, I’m sure Elsie will sort that out. As for the ribbons and petals, that must be what Wendy had planned to source today before the visit to the hotel while I began a quote for a new couple.’

‘Shall I get the ribbon and the petals then? Where could I find those?’
Roxie looked across the desk. ‘And what colour are the tablecloths?’

‘You’ll probably be able to get the ribbon in the haberdashery a couple of shops along. If they’ve not got it there’s another shop in Trestow. Do you know where Trestow is?’

‘I’m pretty sure I passed a sign for Trestow on my way here.’

‘Okay, great. You’ll find the flower petals in Trestow for definite. Gabby, a previous volunteer, works at the flower shop. I can send her a text and let her know what we’re after if you like?’ Molly pulled her mobile from her back pocket.

‘That’d be great. Thanks. So, where are these tablecloths?’

‘One second.’ Finishing off the text message, Molly wheeled her chair back and pulled a square of cream fabric out from between two wedding magazines. ‘Here’s the colour of the tablecloth.’

‘Oh, that should be pretty easy to match then.’ Taking the fabric, Roxie rubbed it between her index finger and her thumb. ‘Satin tablecloths?’

‘You’d think so, but...’ Molly reached out behind her again and laid a small box on the table before lifting the lid and revealing roll after roll of cream ribbon. ‘... apparently, these aren’t a close enough match. According to Shona’s mum, of course.’

Widening her eyes, Roxie nodded. It would not be as easy as she’d assumed then. ‘This could be fun, then.’

‘That’s one way to describe it!’

‘And I’m guessing we need to find the ribbons and the petals before the meeting tomorrow?’

‘Yep.’

‘What are the ribbons for?’ She looked down at the box full of ribbons. They were only thin.

‘To tie around the bouquets.’

Roxie frowned. ‘Will it even be noticeable that the ribbons aren’t the exact same shade of cream as the tablecloths then?’

‘Nope.’ Molly shook her head and shrugged. ‘You wait until you meet Shona’s mum, though. She’s convinced it will.’

‘In that case, I’d better get on and try to find the perfect ribbon.’ Pushing her chair back away from the table, Roxie stood up. ‘Wish me luck.’

‘Good luck. You’re going to need it.’

Laughing, Roxie shook her head as she laid her hand on the door handle. 'I had a feeling you were going to say that.' Turning the handle, Roxie pulled the door open and froze. Diane was making her way across the bakery floor, a man by her side. It couldn't be. Not him.

'Roxie.'

'Mitch! What on earth are you doing here?' Closing the door softly behind her, Roxie watched as Diane returned to the bakery counter, Mitch pausing a few feet away from her.

'I came to give you this. It's yours.' Mitch walked towards her and held out a plastic bag.

'You came to give me something?' She frowned. What had Mitch ever had of hers? She hadn't seen him in over two years. Two years, seven months, and three weeks, to be exact. Why had he come now to give her whatever it was he had? And how had he known where she was?

'Yes.' He nodded towards the bag.

'What is it?' Taking the bag, she pulled out a pale blue hoodie and ran her index finger over the navy cursive writing, Birmingham University. 'My hoodie from uni. Where did you get it?'

'Harvey had it.' Mitch shrugged. 'He wanted to return it to you.'

Roxie squashed it back into the bag before throwing her arms around him. 'Thank you! In Cornwall?'

'Well, I was passing this way.' Looking at his feet, Mitch ran the palm of his hand across the top of his head, his short, dark hair quickly springing back. 'For work.'

'Right. For work. Well, thank you.' She nodded towards the bag. 'I didn't think I'd ever see that hoodie again. Or you, for that matter.'

'You're welcome.' Mitch looked towards the door out onto the cobbles and back at Roxie. 'Did you fancy grabbing a quick drink?'

Glancing at the time, Roxie shrugged. It was still early and buying him coffee would be the least she could do. 'Okay.' Winding the handles of the bag around her fingers, she nodded outside. 'There's a café next door. We can grab a coffee from there.'



WITH A TAKEAWAY CUP in one hand and the bag in the other, Roxie shook her head, trying to get the strand of hair out from in front of her eyes.

‘Here, let me.’ Pausing, Mitch reached his hand towards her and tucked her hair behind her ear.

‘Thanks.’ She took a sip of coffee, letting the bitter taste pool in her mouth before swallowing. ‘I’ve got to ask why?’ She nodded towards the bag.

‘Harvey found it in the loft when they were packing.’

‘He and Jen are moving?’ She glanced across at Mitch, her eyes lingering on his strong jawline. He was hiding something. Keeping something back. She knew what he was like. She’d dated Harvey, his brother, for fifteen years. She’d practically spent her early adulthood around the family. And she’d known Mitch for practically her whole life, they’d gone to school together. She knew him.

He led the way down a ramp and onto the beach. ‘Yes. He needs to get away. To have a fresh start.’

She nodded. Wasn’t that what Jen had been about? A fresh start? He’d finished with her shortly after... everything had happened and had found Jen.

‘More of a fresh start.’ Mitch waved his hand in front of him as if indicating extra space between then and now.

Roxie shook her head and smiled. ‘You always know what I’m thinking.’

‘Ha-ha, it’s my party trick.’

‘Yes. It always had been.’ It was true. She’d always had to explain everything in such detail to Harvey as though her thoughts and feelings were truly alien to him, whereas Mitch had always just accepted her thoughts, feelings, answers. She shrugged. It was probably because they’d spent so much time together at school. They’d known each other longer than she and Harvey had. She grinned. She remembered the evening she’d got together with Harvey. She and a group of friends had wormed their way into a house party some college students were having. She held up the plastic bag. ‘Why bring it down here? Why didn’t Harvey just drop it around when I was back? If I’m honest, I would have expected him just to bin it, anyway.’

‘As I said earlier, I was coming this way for work. Tiverton.’ Mitch shrugged.

‘Right. Well, thank you.’ She looked out across the sandy beach to the ocean. The sun’s rays were reflected on the surface, a dancing light show. ‘How did you know where I was?’

Swapping his cup to the other hand, he pulled out a piece of folded paper.

‘My letter?’ She frowned. That had been for Harvey. No one else.

‘Yes.’

Roxie kicked at the sand beneath her trainers, uncovering a smooth purple pebble. Reaching down, she picked it up. She wasn’t even sure why she’d written that she’d come to volunteer here. She’d known Harvey wouldn’t care. Had it been to show that he wasn’t the only one moving on? Of course, volunteering at a seaside bakery wasn’t as huge a life step as getting married, but it told him something, didn’t it? It told him she was fine. That she was happy.

‘I know I shouldn’t have.’ He slid her letter back into his pocket.

‘Really? Great. I guess he’s probably shared it with anyone who’d listen then.’ She raised her hand to her face, pushing back her hair again as the plastic of the bag scratched across her face.

‘No. Just me.’ He rubbed his thumb across the back of his hand.

Narrowing her eyes, she watched him. There was something he wasn’t saying. He’d never been able to lie or omit the truth. Not without giving off major red flags, anyway. ‘He didn’t read it, did he?’

‘Harvey?’ Mitch kept his eyes focused ahead of him, darting from left to right.

‘Yes, Harvey. Harvey didn’t read my letter, did he?’ Why not? She’d sent it to let him, to give him her blessing.

‘No, he didn’t.’ Mitch looked back towards her. ‘I’m sorry. I tried to get him to. I even tried to read it out to him, but he shut me down.’

‘He recognised my handwriting.’ She shrugged. ‘I guess that’s up to him. I thought I was doing the right thing in sending it. I thought I was drawing a line, letting him move on without any ill feeling. I wanted to give him peace.’

‘I know. He...’

‘I should get back to work. I have ribbons to find and dried petals to buy. Thank you for this. However random it is.’

Mitch nodded. ‘You’re welcome.’

Stepping forward, she gave him a quick hug before making her way back up the ramp and calling over her shoulder. ‘Hope your work thing goes well.’

Lifting his hand up in response, Mitch turned back to the sea.

Chapter Six



Throwing her takeaway cup in the recycling bin, Roxie made her way to the small haberdashery a couple of shops down from Elsie's bakery. Random. It was random. Kind though. Mitch must surely have been there when Harvey had found her hoodie. She could only imagine Harvey itching to throw it, to get rid of anything and everything that reminded him of that part of his life.

She pushed open the door to the shop, a small bell alerting the owner to her arrival with a dainty metallic tinkle. Ribbon. Where was the ribbon?

'Morning. What a lovely day it is, isn't it? What can I help you with today?'

'Yes, it is. I'm after some ribbon that matches this, please.' She rummaged in her pocket before pulling out the square of cream material.

'Ah, I'm guessing you're the new volunteer at Elsie's? I'm Trish, welcome to the bay.'

'Thanks. Yes, that's me.' Roxie grinned.

'In that case, I might just have what you're looking for. Wendy asked me to order in some ribbons that might be a good match. Is she not about?' Trish rummaged beneath the counter before pulling out a plastic box full of reels of cream ribbon.

'Her little boy has come down with chicken pox.'

'Oh, poor little Hudson.' Trish looked towards the door as the bell tinkled again. 'Are you all right looking on your own for a while? Mrs Jefferies has come in for her wool.'

'Yes, thanks.' Roxie glanced as Trish made her way towards the woman who had just come in before lowering her bag onto the top of the counter and looking through the reels. The collection of ribbons looked promising, and if she didn't have the swatch of fabric with her to match, she'd have assumed they were all much the same colour. Shifting on her feet, she began going through the box, holding the swatch next to each ribbon.

Lifting a possible match from the box, she placed it on the counter next to the bag. Frowning, she pushed the box and reel of ribbon towards the back of the counter and pulled out the hoodie, laying it across the counter. For

something which had been stashed away in the loft for years, it looked in good condition. She turned it over, the scent of fabric conditioner wafting towards her. It had been freshly washed. She lifted the hoodie to her nose. Yep, she was right. It had.

She glanced towards the window, immediately rolling her eyes. What was she expecting? For Mitch to still be outside? He'd probably already left for his work thing.

'Any luck?' Trish walked behind the counter.

'Sorry.' Bundling the hoodie back into the bag, Roxie picked up the reel of ribbon she'd matched. 'Yes, I think this one matches.'

'Ooh, let's have a look.' Taking the reel, Trish waited for Roxie to hand her the swatch of fabric before holding them against each other. 'Yes, I think you're right.'



PUSHING OPEN THE BAKERY door, Roxie grinned as she spotted Teresa standing at the bakery counter, a tray full of coffees sitting on the counter.

'Talk about perfect timing! You've come in a lull and at coffee time.' Diane grinned.

'I'll go and make another.' Teresa finished handing out the mugs before turning back to the coffee and cake counter.

'I can make one.' Roxie closed the door behind her.

'I'm happy to. It'll only take a moment.' Teresa smiled.

'How did it go? Did you find the ribbon?' Lowering her mug, Molly gazed at the bag in Roxie's hand. 'It looks as though you've got loads.'

'Oh no, that's not all ribbons and petals.' Roxie laughed as she pulled out the hoodie, laying it in a crumpled heap on the counter before taking out the small paper bag with the ribbon reel in and the boxes of dried petals. Scrunching the now empty bag, she discarded it on the counter before pulling the reel of ribbon from the paper bag. 'Here. What do you think?'

Taking the ribbon and the swatch of fabric, Molly held them both up towards the light. 'Wow, I don't think we could get a closer match. It looks perfect.'

'Thank goodness for that. I think all I'll be seeing is cream material and ribbons for weeks after trying to match it.' She tucked the ribbon and swatch safely back inside the bag.

‘Here you go.’ Teresa placed a fresh mug of coffee on the counter next to Roxie.

‘Lovely. Thank you.’ Wrapping her hands around the mug, she took a sip.

‘Ooh, what’s this?’ Diane picked up the hoodie, shaking it out. ‘Is this what that cute guy was dropping off? He said he had something to give you.’

‘Ooh, what a cute guy. I must have missed that.’ Brooke put her mug down.

‘Ah no, he’s my ex’s brother. He was just dropping this off. My ex found it in the loft when he was packing up to move and Mitch, his brother, was heading to Tiverton for work so he said he’d drop it by.’

‘That’s cool. Where was he travelling from?’ Diane folded the hoodie before replacing it back on top of the counter.

‘Bristol way.’ Roxie took another sip of her coffee.

‘Bristol? You do know that Tiverton is nearer Bristol than we are here, don’t you?’ Diane picked up her mug.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Penworth Bay is at least two hours away from Tiverton and Tiverton is north of us.’

Roxie frowned. ‘So he wouldn’t have needed to come by here to get to his work thing?’

‘Not if his work thing was in Tiverton.’ Diane shrugged.

‘Oh, right.’ Roxie shook her head. ‘Maybe I heard him wrong then.’

‘It’s a long way to come just to drop off a hoodie.’ Teresa gathered the empty mugs up. ‘Unless you needed it, that is.’

‘It didn’t occur to me that I’d ever see it again, to be honest. I’d assumed my ex had got rid of it years ago.’ Roxie dropped it into the bag. If Mitch had gone out of his way that far, why hadn’t he just posted it? Or even waited until she returned home. She only lived twenty minutes from his house in Bristol.

Chapter Seven



Roxie scanned the notebook in front of her, desperately trying to remember the details of Shona and Wayne's wedding. She wanted to be prepared if Shona's mum questioned her.

'How's it going?' Molly kicked the office door closed behind her and passed Roxie a mug. 'Here, I thought we should prepare ourselves with a dose of caffeine.'

Glancing up, Roxie grinned. 'Thanks. Okay, I think. What's her name? Shona's mum?'

'Lindsey. Not Linda or Lind-say, it's Lind-sey.' Molly laughed. 'Don't repeat Wendy's mistake and call her Linda. Wendy's not been able to forget it.'

'Right, Lindsey. I'll try to remember.' She closed the notebook and sipped her coffee. 'I have a feeling we're going to need that pub quiz to let our hair down after this meeting. If your and Wendy's enthusiasm for the lovely Lindsey is anything to go by.'

'Haha, you may just be right. Although everything she asked for has been implemented now so she might actually be happy today.'

'Fingers crossed then!' Roxie crossed her fingers before downing the rest of her coffee. 'Ready?'

'Oh yes.'



'AND THIS...' LINDSEY picked up the reel of ribbon, holding it at arm's length before letting it drop back onto the surface of the table. 'You can't really believe nobody will notice how different the shade is?'

'Well, I...' Molly began.

'And this coffee. It's hardly up to standard, is it? What are they serving us? Some cheap instant granules? Some powder out of a jar?' Lindsey curled her lips up at the taste of the coffee before clinking the delicate cup back onto its saucer. 'I do hope this will not be served at my Shona's wedding.'

Roxie lifted up the drinks menu, aware her shoulders were probably shaking as she tried to contain her laughter. She couldn't help it. The ribbons

matched; the coffee was good. Setting her face, she lowered the menu. 'Shona, Wayne, remind me what flowers you're having in the bouquet and table centres.'

'Roses. Cream roses.' Shona looked into her coffee.

'Perfect. The roses will naturally be slightly different shades. The petals on some flower heads may be creamier than others, for example, so the ribbon will pick up on all those slight differences. The differences which makes the roses special, unique. That way, the colour of the ribbons will help merge the individual beauty of the flowers and the tablecloths.' Roxie grinned, hoping that she came across as understanding rather than trying to put Lindsey in her place.

'Thank you.' Shona whispered, the first smile of the day illuminating her face.

'Umm, I suppose you have a point. I have asked the florist to match the roses as much as she can, but I suppose there will be subtle differences.' Lindsey nodded. 'I won't change my mind about the coffee, though.' She looked pointedly at Roxie as if she knew what Roxie had been going to say next.

Nodding, Roxie ran her index finger down the menu. 'There are plenty of other choices and it's not too late to choose a different coffee. Maybe you three could have a coffee-tasting session once we've explored the other amendments and let us know your final choice?'

Letting her glasses slide to the end of her nose, Lindsey looked at her before nodding slowly.

'Great. Shall we take a walk around the hotel now, then?' Standing up, Molly looked around the table and smiled.

'Yes, please. I'd quite like to see where the aisle will be and where everyone will be seated. Just to get it clear in my mind.' Shona took Wayne's hand across the table. 'I've been dreaming of our wedding day since the day Wayne asked me to marry him, but the closer we get to our big day, the more nervous I feel.'

'Of course we can.' Molly pushed her chair back. 'Shall we go and take a wander now?'

'That would be lovely, thanks.' Standing up, Shona took Wayne's hand, her hands shaking as she did so.

'Hey, it'll be great.' Reaching out towards her, Roxie put her hand on Shona's shoulder. 'When the big day comes, all you'll be thinking about is

marrying your soulmate. Everything you're worrying about leading up to the day will melt away. You won't be thinking of what coffee you're drinking or who's there watching you. You'll just be focusing on the two of you. Everything and everyone else will melt into the background. The background of the day you two get married.'

'I hope so. I'm so worried that I'm going to end up tripping down the aisle and making a complete fool of myself or that I'll spill red wine down my dress at the wedding breakfast or something. I hate being the centre of attention.'

'Honestly, Shona, nothing apart from you and Wayne will matter. When the day comes, you won't be thinking about anything else but each other.' Roxie smiled as Wayne hugged Shona around the shoulders. They were such a lovely couple. So quiet and attentive towards each other, she wondered if getting married somewhere as posh and large as The Fern was either of their decision.

'How long have you been married?'

'Oh, I'm not married!' Roxie laughed.

'Sorry, I just assumed...' Shona blushed.

'Aw no, it's okay.' Touching her forearm, Roxie smiled. 'I almost got married once and someone once told me that despite how huge all the decisions we have to make feel, on the big day, they won't matter. The little details that keep us up at night and the things we worry about going wrong, stuff that you're worried about, tripping or spilling something. They won't matter. They don't matter.'

Shona nodded slowly. 'They sound very wise. The person who told you that, I mean.'

'Yes. They are.' Roxie frowned. She remembered the conversation well. About a month before she and Harvey were supposed to get married, she'd wrapped herself up with doubts—would Harvey's uncle like the cheesecake they'd ordered? Would Auntie Jill be disappointed they weren't getting married in a church? Were her wedding shoes too high? Her dress too much? The only person who had calmed her fears had been Mitch. He'd popped over to see Harvey after work one day and Harvey had been caught in traffic. He'd seen how terrified she'd been, and he'd calmed her fears, reminded her why she was getting married. And it had worked. The strange thing was, Mitch had never been married and yet she'd trusted him. She'd trusted his words enough to squash her fears.

‘Maybe we should just elope?’ Shona giggled as she looked up at Wayne.
‘You’ll do no such thing!’ Lindsey glared at Roxie before taking Shona’s hand and leading the way forward.



‘AND THIS IS WHERE WE’LL have our first dance?’ Shona looked around the vast, wood-panelled hall.

‘Yes, a dancefloor will be laid right about here, the band off to the side and you’ll have your first dance as husband and wife.’ Molly grinned.

‘Wow.’ Wayne turned around, his eyes wide.

‘Is it all starting to feel real?’ Molly tucked her pen behind her ear.

‘Yes, yes, it is. In a good way, though.’ Nodding, Wayne looked at Shona.

‘And how about you, Shona? Has it helped to walk everything through?’ Roxie smiled.

‘It has. It really has. It all feels a little less scary.’

‘Good, I’m glad to hear it.’

‘In fact, and this may sound crazy, but would you mind if we practised our first dance?’ Shona looked at the floor before glancing up at everyone.

‘Of course not. Why don’t we give you two a little space? We can head back to the restaurant and taste those other coffees. We’ll meet you there when you’re ready.’ Molly indicated to Lindsey. ‘Shall we?’

Looking from her daughter to Molly and back again, Lindsey nodded.

‘Thank you.’ Shona grinned before turning to Wayne.

‘No problem.’ Winking at Shona, Roxie began following Molly and Lindsey. As they stepped out into the corridor, Roxie quietly shut the door behind her. When Elsie had asked her to help Molly with the wedding planning, she’d been worried it would mean being stuck in the office all day, but despite her worries, she was enjoying it. Even with Lindsey coming along with them, the trip to the hotel had proven fun and, above all, rewarding. Shona’s confidence had increased as they’d walked through her big day, explaining what would happen when and where and if she could have just a little impact on helping her in the run-up to the biggest day of her life, then Roxie was happy.

‘Right, where’s the restaurant again? This place is huge.’ Roxie looked up and down the vast corridor.

‘Ha-ha, this way. Towards the front.’ Molly pointed to the left.

‘I’m glad one of us knows where we’re going!’ Roxie laughed as she followed Molly and Lindsey. ‘So, what are your thoughts, Lindsey?’

‘I feel a little happier knowing my views have been taken into account. I’m still not one hundred percent happy with the curtain choice in the reception hall, but I agree when the cream voile is hung, the colour choice won’t be as harsh.’

‘That’s right. Once the voiles are in place and the tables with the cream tablecloths, everything will look brighter.’ Roxie looked down at the clipboard in her hand, a swatch of the voile in question stapled to the wedding notes. She looked out of the window across the immaculately kept gardens as Lindsey began speaking of coffee choices again. Maybe they should just do away with the coffee? Serve tea or water instead. She shook her head. This was a big day for Lindsey, too. Her only daughter was getting married. No wonder she wanted everything to be perfect. Her mum had been the same. Just not quite as vocal, more quietly disapproving.

‘I’d like to see a selection of the cups they offer, too. I’m assuming we have a choice.’

‘Well, I...’

Was that Mitch? Pausing, Roxie blinked against the sun, cupping her hands against the glass of the window so she could see better. It was! It was Mitch, sitting on a bench, balancing his laptop on his knees. ‘Molly, Lindsey. Sorry, I’ll catch you up.’

‘Okay. No worries.’ Molly nodded as she answered Lindsey’s latest query.

Chapter Eight



Glancing up and down the corridor, Roxie spotted a door out into the gardens and made a beeline for it. She should have asked when he was heading to Tiverton. She'd just assumed he was going straight there. Leaving this area as soon as he'd dropped off her hoodie. Letting the door swing closed behind her, she waved her hand over her head. 'Mitch!'

Laughing as he looked one way and then the other, she walked across to him. 'Hey, I thought you'd be on your way to your work thing by now.'

'Roxie. Hi. What are you doing here? Are you staying here at The Fern?' Mitch closed his laptop.

Roxie raised her eyebrows. 'At this place? No, I'm staying above the bakery. Are you?'

'Yes, just for a couple of nights.' He nodded.

'I thought you had a work thing?' She sat down on the bench.

'Yes, I'm on my way to Truro.'

'Truro? I'm sure you said Tiverton.' Roxie scrunched up her forehead. Had she remembered it wrong? No, she'd mentioned to Diane and Brooke that he was on his way to Tiverton, and they'd told her Penworth Bay was nowhere near the town. He'd definitely said Tiverton.

Looking down at the laptop on his knees, he ran his hand across its shiny surface. 'I didn't come down here on work business.'

'You didn't? Then why did you come all this way?' She looked over at him, trying to search his face for answers.

'To give you your hoodie.' He shook his head before looking across at her. 'To see you.'

'To see me?' Huh, she hadn't been expecting that response.

Mitch cleared his throat. 'It was your letter. I'm sorry. It was just lying there on Harvey's kitchen table when I popped round, and I couldn't help myself.'

'Right.' She looked down at the ground in front of her, focusing on a stray dandelion, its leaves somehow having survived the mower. He'd already told her he'd seen where she was staying. She'd assumed as much that he'd read the rest of it too.

‘I know I shouldn’t have. I just...’

‘It doesn’t matter.’ She shrugged.

‘It does. I shouldn’t have. Sorry.’

Roxie sighed. ‘You read my letter, so what? I still don’t understand why you’re down here. Why did you want to see me? I told him I forgave him. I want him to be happy. Both of them to be happy. I’m not about to gate-crash their wedding holding a banner above my head declaring my undying love for him.’

Shaking his head, he chuckled. ‘Sorry, I shouldn’t laugh.’

‘Hey, go ahead. Maybe I should, if it’s that entertaining. No, seriously, mine and Harvey’s relationship was a long time ago now.’ Leaning back against the wooden bench, she laid the clipboard between them. ‘Maybe I shouldn’t have sent that letter. I just thought I was doing the right thing. After everything...’

‘No, it was good. I’m sure it would have helped.’

‘If he’d read it.’

‘Well, yes.’

‘What did he say? When he saw it? I know he didn’t read it, but when he saw I’d sent him it.’ She glanced over at him as his cheek muscles flickered.

‘You know him.’

‘Nothing. He said nothing.’ It wasn’t as though she’d thought he would have. Not really. It didn’t even surprise her that he didn’t read it. ‘Never mind, I wrote it more for my peace of mind, anyway.’

‘It meant something to him, receiving it. I’m sure it did. He’s just never been very good at voicing his feelings. You know that.’

‘Huh, I do.’

He cleared his throat again. ‘He feels bad about what happened. That’s why he needs this fresh start. Why he finished things with you. You’re a constant reminder of the mistake he made.’

‘Right.’ Her voice was strangled, high-pitched. She tugged at her sleeve, pulling it right down to her fingers.

‘He’s an idiot.’ Mitch reached out, his warm touch fleeting, a light electricity of senses against her thumb. ‘He should never have treated you the way he did. Is. He should have more gratitude.’ He shuffled towards the back of the bench, resting his hands on top of his laptop. ‘You saved his life.’

Roxie blinked, desperately searching for something, anything, in the near distance to focus her attention on, to distract her from that night playing over

and over in her mind's eye at the mere mention of it. She locked her gaze on a bandstand hidden amongst the trees opposite, its exquisitely shaped wooden railings trailing with beautiful clematis. 'Anyone would have done the same thing.'

Mitch scoffed. 'I don't know many people who hand on heart would run into a burning building.'

'To save their fiancé, they would.' She squinted, trying to count the flowers.

'Umm, maybe. I don't know. You did though.' He exhaled deeply. 'And all the thanks you got was for him to cancel the wedding.'

Fourteen. She could count fourteen clematis flowers. Just. It was difficult to distinguish them from the white of the wooden structure. She thought there were fourteen.

'I'm sorry he treated you the way he did.'

She swallowed. The conversation wasn't going away. 'It's not your fault. It's not really his fault either.'

'I know. Well, I'm trying to understand. He spoke to me about it all. Once. About a year ago now. He explained that he felt guilty every time he was with you.' Mitch shifted on the bench, catching the laptop as it fell.

'Every time he looked at me.' Tearing her eyes away from the clematis, she glanced down at her sleeve, still gripping the fabric in her fingers.

'Yes, no.'

Roxie nodded.

'Not like that.' He glanced at her. 'Not because...'

'It's okay.' Roxie waved away his remark.

'Roxie.' Twisting on the bench, Mitch looked at her. 'I meant because he feels guilty. Not when he looked at your scar, just when he saw you. It reminded him of what could have happened. Of what did happen.'

'Hey, I'm over it.' Roxie held up her hands, palms forward. 'What's done is done.'

'He shouldn't have dropped you like that. It was his fault. He should have been grateful, not dropped you.' Mitch looked at his feet. 'I don't agree with what he did. Heck, I wholeheartedly disagree and I've not been quiet about it.'

She smiled, a slow, thin smile. 'I bet that went down well.'

'Ha, you know Harvey.'

‘So why did you want to see me?’ Roxie looked across at him, waiting for him to meet her eyes.

‘To see how you were doing.’

‘I’m good. You really came all this way to see if I was okay? Why?’

‘Honestly?’ He glanced away, his eyes flicking around the gardens before looking back at her. ‘I’m embarrassed by my brother’s behaviour.’

‘Harvey and I would never have worked. Whatever had happened.’ It was true. She’d been devastated when he’d turned his back on her when she’d most needed him, but it had been a blessing in disguise. She saw that now. She’d seen his true colours.

‘Haha, I could have told you that years ago.’ Mitch chuckled as he stroked the stubble covering his chin.

‘You could?’ Bringing her knee up onto the bench next to her, she twisted to face him. ‘Years ago?’

‘Well, yes.’ He shrugged. ‘You were always too good for him.’

‘Ooh, now if only I was still in contact with him, I’d tease you that I’d tell him.’ She laughed, the awkwardness between them short-lived.

‘You knew that’s how I felt.’

‘Umm, I guessed you weren’t particularly happy with us being together, but not that you didn’t think he was good enough for me. If only I’d known.’ She grinned.

‘You knew!’

Her grin faded, and she touched his knee. ‘Well, thank you for looking out for me. I didn’t need you to, though. As you can see, I’m perfectly fine. More than fine, I’m happy.’

‘I knew you would be. I guess that I wanted to see you, anyway.’

‘Thank you.’ She glanced back at the gardens in front of her before catching his gaze again. ‘Hey, how long are you down here for?’

He shrugged. ‘Honestly? I’m not sure. Initially, I’d planned to head back once I’d returned your hoodie and seen you were okay, but it felt good to get away, so I stayed. I might head back tomorrow, maybe.’

‘Awesome! So you’ll be here tonight then? You should come to the pub quiz in Penworth Bay. There’s a whole group of us going from the bakery. It’s supposed to be great fun. You’ll come, won’t you?’

‘Umm... why not?’

‘Great!’

Chapter Nine



‘Are you ready, love?’ Elsie tapped on the bedroom door. Pulling her hoodie over her head, Roxie opened the door. ‘Yep. All ready.’

‘I’ll walk you down to the pub, so you know where it is. Wendy and Connor usually drop little Hudson off for me and Ian to babysit before heading out, but with Hudson still poorly, they’re not going to the quiz today.’ Elsie shrugged into her coat.

‘That’d be great, thanks.’ Roxie grabbed her purse before pulling the door to.

‘I don’t know what we’ll do with ourselves, not having Hudson to look after. Do we?’ Elsie peered into the living room where Ian was sitting in front of the TV.

‘Nope. Just think, though, soon we’ll have two little ones to look after.’ Standing up, Ian picked up his and Elsie’s empty mugs and joined them.

‘Oh, yes. Just imagine that, babysitting Hudson and little Bonnie together.’ Grinning, Elsie pulled a handkerchief from her pocket and patted her eyes again.

‘Are you off again, love?’ Swapping the empty mugs to one hand, Ian rubbed Elsie’s shoulder. ‘I don’t think I’ve seen you go a day with dry eyes since Bonnie was born.’

‘Aw, they’re happy tears, love. Very happy tears.’ Smiling, Elsie pocketed the handkerchief again before turning to Roxie. ‘We’d best get you up to the pub before the quiz starts, love.’

‘Why don’t you two come? It sounds as though it’s a fun night and you’ve not got any of the kids to babysit.’ Roxie grinned.

‘Oh, no. The pub quiz is for you young ones. No one wants us bringing the team down.’

‘Come on, it’ll be fun. Everyone will be glad to see you.’

‘Why not? What do you think, Elsie?’ Ian placed the mugs on the coffee table again and slipped into his coat.



AS THEY NEARED THE pub, Roxie checked her watch. She'd arranged with Mitch to meet him outside. 'I'm just going to hang back and wait for Mitch. I'll come on in when he gets here.'

'Okay, love.' Elsie pulled the pub door open, loud music and laughter seeping out into the quiet street.

'Who's Mitch?'

Elsie's voice was lost in the general chatter of the pub as she answered him before the door closed with a satisfying thud. The general chatter of the pub goes muted again.

Perching on a pub bench, Roxie glanced towards the window. She could hear the excitement rise as Elsie and Ian were greeted. Smiling, she looked up and down the hill. At the bottom of the hill, where the road curved towards the cobbled street and the bakery, moonlight glimmered on the surface of the ocean, a shimmer of movement as the waves crept inland. Up towards the summit of the hill, Victorian-built terrace houses looked down on the bay. Apart from the pub and the garage next door, a school and what looked to be a village hall sat towards the top of the hill, the only buildings punctuating the row of picture postcard cottages.

Roxie took a deep breath in. Even from up here, she could still smell the salt of the ocean, the freedom it implies. She grinned. She'd chosen the perfect place to spend her holiday from work, the perfect community to be welcomed into, the perfect escape.

'Hey, Roxie. Sorry, I'm late. I may have got a bit lost.' Mitch walked across to her, pausing in front of her, his cheeks flushed. 'I parked the car in a carpark by the beach thinking the pub was there, but it was a restaurant.'

'Ah yes, Daisy and Ollie's restaurant. Did you run the rest of the way?'

'Ha-ha, can you tell?' He held his palms against his cheeks, cooling himself down.

'Are you ready to expel your wisdom?' she nodded towards the pub door.

'Umm, I'm not sure I have any particularly useful wisdom to expel, but I could certainly do with a drink.' Mitch pulled open the door, letting Roxie through ahead of him.

'Roxie! Over here!'

Scanning the inside of the pub, Roxie spotted Diane waving manically from a table by the window. Waving back, Roxie led the way towards her, weaving through pub tables and people standing in clusters. As she made her way over to Diane, she realised the table she was standing at was, in fact,

three tables pushed together, chairs encircling the makeshift table. Pausing, she glanced around at all the people squashed together, chatting and laughing. She recognised some of them: Diane, Brooke, Molly and, of course, Elsie and Ian. She could see Heather and Gus perching on chairs next to the window.

‘Roxie!’ Pushing her chair back, Heather stood up and indicated Roxie and Mitch to join her. ‘Everyone, this is Roxie, who came to the rescue when Daisy was in labour.’

A chorus of welcomes and applause erupted around the table as Roxie and Mitch squeezed their way through to the two empty chairs next to Heather. ‘Hi, everyone. I didn’t really do anything. Lovely to meet you all. This is Mitch.’ She indicated Mitch as she slipped into the seat next to Heather.

‘Hi, Mitch. Pleased to meet you.’ Gus held his hand out towards Mitch. ‘And, of course, great to see you again, Roxie. How are you finding the bakery?’

‘Great thanks. Everyone’s been so friendly.’ Roxie grinned as Teresa passed her and Mitch glasses of some blue liquid. She looked at it before taking a sip, the refreshing taste of the cocktail much nicer than it at first looked.

‘I hear you’re helping Molly with the wedding planning while Wendy’s off?’ A woman next to Mitch grinned at them before shaking her head and holding her hand against her chest. ‘Sorry, I should have introduced myself first. I’m Olivia and this is Scott.’

‘All right? Good to meet you both.’ Scott nodded.

‘Hi, lovely to meet you both, too.’ Roxie nodded before answering Olivia’s question. ‘Yes, I’m working with Molly at the moment. Which has been brilliant fun so far.’

‘That’s great then.’ Olivia nodded before turning to the people next to her. ‘This is Freya and Chris.’

‘Hi.’ Roxie held her hand up.

‘Lovely to meet you, Roxie and Mitch.’ Freya smiled at them. ‘It’s probably a bit overwhelming to meet everyone like this, I imagine?’

‘There are a lot of people! I assumed the team would be made up of people working at the bakery.’ She looked up and down the table again. There must have been, what, at least twenty more people huddled together.

‘Ha-ha, it is. Well, kind of. You obviously know the people you work with, but the others all either used to work at the bakery or our partners to

people who did.'

'Wow, Elsie must have a high turnover of staff then.' She glanced across at Elsie, who was chatting with Teresa and another woman. From her short time at the bakery, she'd got the impression it was a lovely place to work. Everyone had been so supportive and friendly to her, welcoming her into the team and treating her as though she'd been there for years rather than a matter of days. Why on earth would there be such a high turnover of staff?

'Oh no. I mean, people used to volunteer at Elsie's.'

'Volunteer? Everyone here?'

'Yes. Well, half the people here, the other half are their partners.' Freya waved her hands around, encompassing everyone.

Roxie quickly counted the people around the table, trying to work out how many volunteers Elsie had had. Fourteen maybe? Fifteen when Daisy was counted. 'She normally takes in volunteers from the local area?' She'd been lucky then to have spotted the advert online. Maybe Elsie was branching out, offering her voluntary role to people beyond the immediate local area?

'No, no. We're from all over. London, Yorkshire, Wales. You name it.' Olivia laughed. 'For whatever reason, people stayed on here after their time volunteering came to an end.'

Roxie widened her eyes. All of these people had initially visited Penworth Bay to volunteer and were now living here? That was a lot of people to just decide to move down to the bay.

Chapter Ten



‘Testing, testing. One, two, three.’ The echoey voice was followed by a sharp screech of static.

‘Here we go. This is Gerald, the pub landlord. The quiz is about to begin.’ Heather pointed to a man holding a microphone beyond the bar. ‘How are you with pub quizzes?’

‘Not great, I’ve got to admit. You’ve always been good, though, haven’t you, Mitch?’ Roxie glanced at Mitch beside her.

‘Not so bad. Now you’ve said that, though, I’ll stumble over the easiest question.’ Mitch chuckled.

‘Aw, I’m sure you’ll both do fine.’ Heather smiled.

‘Question one; How many islands does Sweden have?’ Gerald’s voice boomed through the pub.

‘Hey! Gerald, we’ve not got our answer sheets or pens yet!’ Standing up, Diane ran towards the bar.

‘You haven’t?’ Gerald looked around the pub, his eyebrows raised, before passing Diane a stack of answer sheets and a plastic cup filled with pens. ‘Diane is coming around with your answer sheets. Think yourselves lucky you have a little longer to think about the answer, but no cheating. I don’t need to remind you to leave your mobile phones in your pockets or handbags.’

‘Here you go.’ Diane placed an answer sheet and pen on the table in front of Teresa and slipped back into her seat.

‘You really want me to write? There’s a reason I pour the drinks, because nobody would ever be able to decipher my handwriting.’ Teresa laughed before passing the answer sheet along the table. ‘Molly, your handwriting is neat. Do you want to take the answers down?’

‘Yes, okay. I don’t have a clue what the answer to the first question is, though!’ Taking the answer sheet, Molly scribbled the team at the top before looking around the table.

‘I’m going to go with three.’ A man next to her said.

‘Three? Are you sure, Jude?’

‘Not really.’ Jude shrugged. ‘It’s just a guess.’

‘Nah, I reckon it’s more. A lot more. How many islands does Scotland have, for example?’ Freya looked around at the group.

‘Umm, not sure. Almost eight hundred, I think. Give or take.’ A woman sitting opposite Diane frowned.

‘Yes, I think you’re right, Gabby. I think they have about seven hundred and ninety and Sweden is a lot bigger than Scotland, so I reckon the number will be a lot higher.’ Brooke tapped the table.

Mitch cleared his throat. ‘I’m pretty sure Sweden has almost two hundred and seventy thousand islands.’

Roxie glanced at him as silence hung around the table.

‘Two hundred and seventy THOUSAND?’ Diane gasped.

‘Shh, don’t let anyone else hear you!’ Brooke giggled.

‘Oops.’ Diane glanced around the room before looking back at Mitch. ‘That many, really?’

‘I’m pretty sure. I know it sounds crazy, but I visited last year and I’m almost certain I’m right.’ Jude took a sip of his drink.

‘Whoa, how would they even name them all?’ Teresa shook her head in disbelief. ‘I wouldn’t blame them if they were just numbered!’

‘Ha-ha, I assume they’re all named. Only about nine hundred and, umm, eighty-four, I think, are inhabited, though.’ Jude shifted in his seat.

‘Wow. I guess it makes sense. I mean, the UK has about seven thousand islands, right?’ Teresa shrugged.

‘What? Seriously?’ Diane widened her eyes.

‘I’m pretty sure. I might be wrong, though.’ Teresa grimaced.

‘That’s it. You’ve had more than enough time. Next question...’ With the sound of Gerald’s voice, the room quietened again in anticipation of the next question.



‘ANSWER SHEETS TO THE bar!’ Gerald’s voice boomed across the pub.

‘I’ll take it down. I’ll grab some more drinks too.’ Standing up, Roxie walked around the table and slipped the answer sheet under her arm before picking up the cocktail pitchers.

‘That would be great, thanks, Roxie.’ Diane grinned.

‘I’ll give you a hand.’ Joining her, Mitch took one of the pitchers from her.’

‘Thanks.’

‘Take this, love. Our treat.’ Leaning across, Elsie slipped a note into Roxie’s hand.

‘Are you sure?’

‘Of course.’ Smiling, Elsie patted Roxie’s hand.

‘Thank you.’ Grinning, Roxie led the way to the bar. ‘I’ve forgotten how fun pub quizzes can be.’

‘Oh, yes. I miss joining my work’s pub quiz team.’ Mitch placed a pitcher on the bar.

‘How’s work going?’ She lowered the pitcher she was carrying next to the other one with a satisfying clunk.

‘Ha, work.’ He shook his head.

‘What do you mean by that? I take it you’re still working with Harvey?’ About two years before she and Harvey had broken up, he and Mitch had decided to go into business together, pool their expertise, be their own bosses whilst enjoying the profits.

‘Nope.’ Shaking his head, Mitch caught the attention of the barman before leaning forward and asking for their order.

‘What happ...?’

‘Back to your seats, people! The answer sheets are in, and the winner will soon be revealed...’ A loud screech and thump emanated from the microphone as Gerald dropped it to the bar and picked up the answer sheets.

Chapter Eleven



We'll catch you up.' Roxie called ahead to Elsie and Ian and indicated the beach to her left. 'We're going to have a quick walk along the beach.'

'Okay, loves. Enjoy yourselves.' Elsie waved while Ian gave them a thumbs-up.

'It's beautiful, isn't it?' Walking down the ramp to the sand below, Roxie looked across at Mitch.

'It sure is. It reminds me of the time we travelled down to Dorset and visited Lulworth Cove. Do you remember that? We all hired out lodges at Warmwell?'

'Yes! I remember. Your parents came too, and you were dating... oh, I can't remember her name. The girl with the long hair.' Roxie tapped the side of her head. 'Macy! That was it. What happened to you two? You were still dating when I and Harvey broke up, weren't you?'

'Only for a short time after.' He looked down at the ground before slipping his trainers and socks off and scooping to pick them up. 'She couldn't handle the family drama.' He curled his two index fingers around the words to highlight 'family drama'.

'Hey, we're doing this?' Roxie gestured to his trainers before slipping her own off. 'Well, I'm sorry. I'm sure some of that 'family drama' had to do with me. Sorry, Macy didn't hang around.'

'Don't you apologise. It was Harvey who made a bad situation worse. Not you. You did the opposite.' He smiled sadly as he reached out to touch her shoulder.

Roxie nodded.

Pausing, Mitch pointed to the sand beneath them. 'Fancy sitting a while?'

'Why not?' Roxie threw her trainers down and sunk her feet into the sand. It was dry and cool beneath her jeans. 'I really am sorry things didn't work out with you and Macy. You were good together.'

He shrugged. 'Obviously not that good together. We'd never have lasted. Not long-term anyway. And, please, don't ever ever apologise. What you

did... Running in after him...' Mitch pinched the bridge of his nose. 'And the way he treated you after. It was inexcusable. It is inexcusable.'

Roxie looked out at the ocean. She remembered the night clearly. For years the replay had been lying in wait, just behind her eyelids, ready to replay the moment she closed her eyes. Now, it wasn't so bad. She didn't like talking about it, but she could sleep at night. She blinked. She'd only done what anyone else would have. Harvey, her fiancé, had been inside that building. When she'd got home from a night shift and seen the house on fire, what else was she going to do? 'I only did what anyone else would have.'

'Maybe. Maybe not.' Mitch sighed. 'But the way he treated you...'

Roxie shook her head. It had hurt. Hurt a lot. He'd called off the wedding, to give them both time to recover, apparently. But she'd known. She'd known almost instantly that things had shifted. Their relationship over. And she understood. Now she understood. He felt guilty being around her, realising that if he hadn't fallen asleep with that candle on, if he'd changed the batteries in the smoke alarm instead of just taking them out or told her he'd taken them out, let her replace them... Things would have been different. It would never have happened. She looked across at Mitch, whose jaw was set, his eyes locked on the waves in front of them. He'd always been the worrier, the one to take responsibility for his brother. 'I'm okay, you know.'

'I know.' He glanced at her, reaching out his hand and taking hers in his. 'Enough of the doom and gloom? Do you fancy a midnight paddle?'

Exhaling deeply, she jumped up, pulling him with her. 'I'm always up for a paddle, midnight or not.' Running across the sand, she dropped his hand before plunging her feet into the ocean. 'Ouch! That's cold. That's cold. That's cold.' Lifting her legs up high one at a time, she ran back out onto the sand, bending over, her hands on her knees and laughing.

'I never took you for a wimp!' He grinned as he strode confidently into the water, pausing as soon as the waves hit his ankles, his face contorted.

'Ha-ha, a wimp you say!' Roxie grinned as he forced himself to stay in the water.

'Nope, I can't do it. I'm a wimp too!' Chuckling, he hurried out of the water again, joining her back on the sand.

Straightening her back, Roxie took gasps of air as the laughter ceased.

'That is so cold!' Grinning, Mitch looked at her.

'You can say that again.' She looked at Mitch, his eyes glistening in the shimmering light of the moon.

‘Here...’ Stepping closer, he brought his hand up to her face, gently wiping his fingers across her cheek. ‘You have sand.’

‘Thanks.’ Taking his hand in hers, she held it against her cheek. What was she doing? Their eyes had locked, the world fading around them. It was just the two of them. The two of them on the beach, in the bay, in the world. She held her breath as he leaned in closer. She closed her eyes as his lips touched hers. His touch was soft and gentle. His lips warm against hers. This was Harvey’s brother. Her friend. Her almost brother-in-law. Opening her eyes, she stepped back, letting his hand fall between them.

‘Roxie, I...’

‘I should go. Elsie and Ian will wonder where I am.’ Turning, she ran up the beach, pausing to grab her trainers before continuing up to the bakery, her feet pounding against the cobbles.



CLOSING THE BAKERY door behind her, she stood, her back against the door, and dropped her trainers onto the tiled floor. What had just happened?

She touched her lips, running the pad of her index finger across her skin. He was Harvey’s brother. What had happened was wrong. So wrong.

This was Mitch. Mitch, who she had been friends with throughout school. Mitch, who had always been there for her whenever she and Harvey had had an argument. Mitch, who had supported her, reached out to her time and time again when Harvey had turned his back after the fire. Mitch, who had driven hours down here to check she was okay after reading her letter.

Had there always been something between them? They’d always been the best of friends, but something romantic? It was wrong. But it had felt so right. The moment his lips had touched hers, she’d felt at home. She’d felt as though she belonged. As though she could conquer anything. In that split second, it had felt right. They had felt right.

Turning, she peered between the slates of the blind covering the glass of the door. She couldn’t see him. Had she scared him away? Would that be it? Did she want that to be it?

As she let the blind fall back into place, she grinned. No, she didn’t want that to be it. She didn’t want to leave it there. She wanted more. She wanted him, to see where things led.

Chapter Twelve



‘You look tired this morning.’ Teresa placed a coffee in front of Roxie before picking back up an icing bag.

‘I am.’ Stifling a yawn, Roxie looked around the kitchen. Elsie was busy rolling out pastry while Teresa finished decorating a trayful of cupcakes.

‘Sorry, I’ll make a start in a moment.’

‘Don’t you worry, love. We’ve got the mornings’ baking under control. Have your coffee and let yourself wake up.’ Elsie paused, rolling pin in hand.

‘Did you have a nice walk along the beach last night?’

Taking a sip of her coffee, Roxie could feel her cheeks warm. ‘Yes, thanks. We tried to paddle, but the water was freezing.’

‘Ha-ha, I bet it was! Especially at that time of the night.’ Teresa laughed.

‘Saying that, I’m sure my daughter Pippa would have braved it!’

‘She’s such a little water baby, that one.’ Elsie smiled.

‘She sure is. She wants to start surfing lessons. That’s all she’s been talking about the last few days, surfing this, surfing that.’ Teresa swapped icing bags, squeezing out tiny petals of lilac icing. ‘Although she has promised to go to bed on time if I sign her up so...’ She shrugged.

‘Aw, I’d encourage her to prove she’ll stick to her bedtimes before you sign her up.’ Elsie nodded.

‘Oh, yes. Don’t worry, I plan to.’ Laughing, Teresa shook her head.

‘Brooke won’t be in today, Roxie, love. She messaged me earlier. I know it’s messing you around, but would you mind covering for her if Molly can free you, please?’ Elsie lowered the rolling.

‘Yes, of course. I’m happy to do whatever you need me to.’ Roxie smiled. It’d be good to get back behind the counter again and Molly had mentioned today was going to be relatively quiet on the wedding planning front. She took another gulp of coffee. She could do with the distraction, anyway. A chance for her mind to catch up with what had happened between her and Mitch yesterday.

‘Oh, good. I must warn you, though, it’s likely to be a busy one as there’s a craft fair up at the village hall.’

‘Busy is good.’ Roxie grinned. Just as she’d hoped.



‘I STILL CAN’T GET OVER how many islands Sweden has.’ Diane shook her head as she placed bread rolls into a bag. ‘That’s one of the things I love about the pub quiz. I always learn something new.’

‘Ha-ha, I know. I remember when Mitch got back from a trip to Sweden and told me. I didn’t believe him either. Not until I’d checked it out on the internet.’ Turning to her customer, Roxie slid a cake box across the counter. ‘That will be four pounds and twenty pence, please?’

‘Thank you, dear.’

‘You’re welcome. Have a lovely day.’ Taking the coins, Roxie popped them in the till before nudging the drawer shut with her hip.

‘You two seemed close.’ Diane waved her customer off and picked up a damp cloth.

Roxie shrugged. ‘We went to school together.’

‘And he’s your ex’s brother too, is that right?’ Wiping the counter, Diane paused and looked at her.

‘Yes, that’s right.’ Placing the back of her hand against her cheek, Roxie hoped the blush wasn’t giving her away.

‘And I’m guessing from the colour of your cheeks that you feel something more for him?’ Diane giggled.

‘What? No. Is it that obvious?’ How had she guessed?

‘Umm, just slightly.’

‘Aw, no.’ Picking up a price list, Roxie fanned herself. ‘I didn’t even know how I really felt about him until last night.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Yes.’ She frowned. Was she? They’d spent a lot of time together in the months after the fire. First of all, he’d visited her in the hospital where they’d spent hours playing board games and whiling the hours away. Once she was discharged and it was clear things between her and Harvey were over, he’d spent days traipsing around houses and flats, helping her find somewhere to rent. Even once she’d moved into her small flat overlooking the river, he’d made a habit of turning up unexpectedly at least twice a month, a pizza box in one hand and a tub of ice cream in the other. Of course, it had fizzled out over time and presumably after Harvey had made known his disapproval.

‘So what changed last night?’ Holding the cloth in her hand, Diane leaned her back against the counter.

‘I’m not sure. We’ve always been close, but last night, I saw a different

side to him.’ She shook her head. ‘No, that’s not what happened. I don’t know. I guess I just saw him properly for the first time.’ She shrugged. ‘I’m not explaining it very well.’

‘Don’t worry. I know what you mean.’ Diane grinned. ‘When are you seeing him next?’

‘I don’t know.’ She swallowed. ‘We kissed, and I ran. I wasn’t sure what to think, and I ran back here leaving him on the beach.’

‘And you’ve not spoken to him today?’

‘No. or messaged.’ She scrunched her nose up. ‘I think I may have pushed him away. I think I gave him the impression I wasn’t interested in him that way. I need to speak to him before he leaves.’

Glancing out of the window, Diane nodded slowly, a grin spreading across her face. ‘Well, there’s no time like the present.’ She pointed the cloth towards the window. ‘Go take your break now.’

Following Diane’s gaze, Roxie paused. There he was. Outside, walking this way. Walking towards the bakery. Throwing the price list down on the counter, she pulled the apron over her head and hurried around the counter. She had no idea what she was going to say to him, what she should say to him. The only thing she knew was that she didn’t want him to leave. She didn’t want him to think she wasn’t interested.

‘Good luck!’

Glancing back at Diane, Roxie grinned as she pulled open the bakery door and paused, unsure what to do.

‘Roxie.’ Mitch stopped in front of her, plunging his hands into his pockets, a slight pink colouring his cheeks. ‘I’m...’

Before she even really knew what she was doing, she stepped forward, closing the gap between them and cupped her hands around his cheeks, pulling him towards her. Closing her eyes, she kissed him, her lips lingering on his before stepping back. ‘Hi.’

‘Right.’ Nodding, Mitch blinked. ‘Well, I wasn’t expecting that.’

‘Sorry...’

‘Hey, no need to apologise. At all.’

She felt the warmth of his hand reaching the back of her neck as he lowered his head, their lips touching again. Laughing, she pulled away. ‘Sorry, I didn’t mean to laugh. I’m just nervous. I’m happy.’

Chuckling, he shook his head. ‘Me too. Where do we go from here?’

‘I’m not sure.’ Slipping her hand in his, she led the way towards the ramp down to the beach. Where did they go? What happened next? ‘What do you want to happen?’

Mitch looked down at the ground as they stepped onto the sand. ‘I’d like to see where things lead.’

‘Me too.’ She rubbed her chin. She couldn’t stop smiling. ‘How can we have known each other this long and only just begin to feel like this about each other?’

‘Umm, well, that’s where we differ. I’ve felt like this for a long time now.’

Pausing, Roxie turned to look at him. ‘What?’

‘Just that. I’ve felt a connection to you for years. I mentally kicked myself repeatedly when you and Harvey got together because I hadn’t been brave enough to ask you out myself.’

‘No way.’ She shook her head. ‘You can’t have?’

‘I have.’ He nodded. ‘Obviously, I knew, though, that nothing could ever happen between us, and now here we are today.’ He looked down at their entwined hands.

‘Here we are today. Wow, I can’t believe I didn’t realise. Why didn’t you say anything? Me and Harvey have been separated for years now.’

‘Honestly? I couldn’t. I didn’t want to lose you as a friend. I didn’t think it was fair to Harvey.’

‘But now you do?’ She frowned. If things became serious—which they might not—then Harvey would find out. What had changed there?

‘No. I don’t know. I guess Harvey wasn’t at the front of my mind last night.’ He shrugged.

Roxie laughed. ‘Fair enough.’

‘Do you think it’s weird?’

‘Yes, but Harvey’s not here. We don’t need to think about him at the moment. Besides, he’s moved on, he’s getting married. We’re down here and we can see how things go before we even need to think about Harvey. Don’t you think?’ Were they being selfish?

‘Good. That’s how I feel as well.’ Pausing, Mitch turned to her, looking her in the eyes. ‘So, you want to see where this gets us?’ He indicated the small space between them.

‘I definitely do.’ Putting her arms around him, she sank against his chest, his heart pounding against hers. How could the simplest thing such as a hug

feel so different in such a short space of time? She still felt as though she was hugging a friend, but there was more. So much more. There was a chemistry between them, an electricity. Something special. Burying her face in the fold of his top, she laughed.

Chapter Thirteen



‘Roxie, have you got the plans for the Beaton’s wedding cake please, love?’ Elsie peered through the door to the office.

‘Umm, yes.’ Roxie looked around the office. Molly was out at a meeting and somehow, in the two short hours Molly had been out, Roxie had managed to cover the desk with plans and notebooks. ‘I’ll bring it through in a moment if that’s okay?’

‘Absolutely. Thanks, love.’

With the door now closed, Roxie pushed back her chair and began riffling through the papers covering the desk. She’d seen the notebook; she’d seen the plans. They had been what she’d been looking at. Working her way through the notebooks and papers, she cleared the surface and pulled the Beaton’s notebook towards her, flicking through it until she came to Wendy’s wedding cake design. She raised her eyebrows. It was everything she’d expected—classic, stylish, perfect.

Pushing open the kitchen door, Roxie held the notebook up high. ‘Found it.’

‘Great, thanks, Roxie. Let’s have a look.’ Pushing a mixing bowl to one side, Elsie wiped her hands down her apron before taking the book and laying it on the table in front of her. ‘Ah, yes, I remember now. Classic.’

‘Yes.’ Nodding, Roxie slipped onto the stool opposite Elsie.

‘Mind, it’s usually Wendy who designs and decorates the cakes, so I’m pretty relieved it’s such a classic design.’ Elsie smiled.

‘Have you heard from Wendy? How’s little Hudson?’

‘Still poorly, bless him. Hudson’s usually full of beans, but Wendy was telling me over the phone earlier that he’s had next to no energy these last couple of days.’ Elsie sighed. ‘I think it’s hit him pretty badly.’

‘Is that Hudson you’re talking about?’ Diane walked in carrying an armful of empty trays. ‘She said she could play dot-to-dot on him. He had that many spots.’

‘Poor Huddy. Let’s hope he gets over it quickly.’ Elsie shook her head.

‘Yes, Wendy was really looking forward to meeting little Bonnie.’ Diane put the empty trays on the table.

“She’ll be able to meet her soon enough. Has it been busy again?” Elsie nodded towards the empty trays.

‘Oh yes. No idea why though as the craft fair was only on yesterday.’ Diane shrugged. ‘How are things with the lovely Mitch?’

Roxie grinned. ‘Good, thanks.’

‘Ha-ha, I had a feeling dropping off your hoodie was just an excuse!’

‘Really? Thanks for sharing!’ Roxie laughed. ‘Nah, it’s all good, although I’m still not sure if it’s the right thing to do.’

‘What is...?’ Diane tilted her head as Brooke called her name from the bakery. ‘Sorry, I’d better get back.’

‘Do you want to talk about it, love?’ Elsie laid the notebook on the table, open on the page of the illustration of the cake.

‘I guess so. Mitch is my ex-fiancé’s brother, and he came all this way to give me a hoodie his brother, Harvey, had found of mine.’ Roxie leaned her elbows against the surface of the table before resting her chin in her hands.

‘Anyway, it turns out he hadn’t just come to return my hoodie to me, and we shared a moment yesterday. We kissed.’

‘I see. And you feel a connection with him?’

‘Yes, absolutely. Mitch and I have been friends for years. We went to school together and stayed in touch after me and Harvey broke up. For a while anyway.’

Elsie nodded slowly. ‘In my experience, old friends can make the perfect partners. They know us. Inside and out. Sometimes more so than we know ourselves. My Ian and I were friends for decades before we finally admitted how we felt about each other. What are you worried about?’

‘Whether it’s the right thing to do or not? He’s my ex’s brother. Any romantic feelings towards him should be a complete no-go, shouldn’t they?’

‘Your ex wants you back?’

Roxie scoffed, despite herself. ‘No, not at all. He doesn’t want anything to do with me. In fact, he’s getting married in a couple of months.’

‘He’s completely moved on, then? He’s found happiness. Does that mean you and his brother aren’t allowed to?’

‘Umm... but it’ll just be awkward, won’t it?’

‘Think about how many times you see him and how much Mitch sees his brother. Are they close?’

Roxie scrunched her nose up. He’d told her that he’d stopped working with him, walked away from the business they’d built together. ‘I’m not sure.

They don't see each other as much as they used to.'

'All you can do, love, is work through it. If you love each other, then nobody or nothing will stand in your way.' Elsie shrugged. 'Give it time, you'll both work it out.'

Roxie ran her finger along the edge of the table. 'You're right. Time will tell.' She knew how she thought she felt about Mitch, but things were so early, it might all fizzle out by this time next week. He might go home, then she'd go home, and things might be how they had been. They might not even see each as friends.

'Have you made any plans to see him again?'

'We're going to meet up this evening. I'm not sure what we're going to do, though.'

'Why don't you make him up a nice picnic? Find somewhere quiet to enjoy it and to give yourselves time to talk? There's a lovely cove next to the beach. It's only the locals who know about it, so it's normally quiet, if not completely deserted.'

'Oh, right? That sounds nice. How do we get to it?' Straightening her back, Roxie smiled. Yes, a picnic would give them time to talk and get to know each other again.

Elsie held her hands out in front of her. 'When you're on the beach facing the water, go across to the right of the beach and you'll see a strip of beach curving around the cliff edge. Follow it around and you'll find yourself in the cove. Mind, though, if the tide comes in, you'll be trapped.'

'Okay, thanks.' Roxie slipped down from the stool.

'It'll be high tide about nine o'clock this evening, so be sure to make it an early picnic. Don't go getting yourselves stranded.' Elsie pointed to her.

'We won't.' Roxie nodded as the kitchen door swung open. 'Daisy, hi!'

'Hi, Roxie. Hi, Elsie.' Letting the kitchen door swing shut behind her, Daisy turned to Elsie.

'Aw, come here, Daisy.' Holding her arms out, Elsie made her way towards Daisy.

'Careful, she's in here, sleeping.' Daisy pulled the top of a baby carrier down, showing Bonnie's tiny nest of hair.

'Ooh, sweet Bonnie.' Stroking Bonnie's head, Elsie then cupped Daisy's cheek and kissed her forehead. 'And how are you getting on, Mummy?'

Daisy yawned. 'Okay, I think. I've no idea if I'm doing anything right and I've not been able to sleep for more than two hours at a time.' She

shrugged.

‘Ah, these babies don’t come with manuals, do they, Roxie?’ Elsie smiled at Roxie.

‘Unfortunately, they don’t, but you’re doing just fine. She’s a happy, content little thing.’ Looking down at Bonnie, Roxie smiled warmly.

‘I hope so.’ Daisy shrugged out of her coat before lifting Bonnie carefully out of the carrier. ‘Do you want a cuddle?’

‘I thought you’d never ask, love.’ Grinning, Elsie gently took the baby before walking up and down the kitchen floor with her, singing quietly.

‘Shall I put some coffee on?’ Roxie turned to the kettle.

‘That sounds divine. Ollie had to pop into the restaurant today and I don’t think I’ve actually finished a drink all day.’ Daisy sunk onto a stool.

Pausing in her song, Elsie rubbed Daisy’s forearm. ‘You’re here now, love. In fact, instead of a coffee, why don’t you have a hot chocolate and then go upstairs for a lie-down?’

‘Seriously? That’s not why I came, but yes, please!’

‘That’s why you should have come. Any time, I’m more than happy to look after this little bundle while you take a nap, you know that.’

‘What about your baking?’ Daisy indicated the wedding cake design in the open notebook.

‘That can wait. I’ve got time and I’ve always got time for my family.’ Elsie smiled at Daisy before continuing her lullaby.

Chapter Fourteen



Roxie looked down at the picnic basket resting on the sand at her feet and checked her watch. He was late. Fifteen minutes late and Mitch was always on time. Always had been. Rolling her shoulders back, she looked out across the ocean. The evening sun was low in the sky, casting a deep orange glow across the water.

Elsie might be right, being friends first may well be a good grounding to a relationship. It had worked for her and Ian. No one could deny that. She'd mentioned to Molly that afternoon about Elsie's theory and Molly had said Elsie and Ian had only been together for just over a year. A year! And already they were married! Roxie hadn't seen that coming. The way they acted towards one another, the love in their eyes. She'd assumed they'd been a couple of decades, not friends for decades.

Yes, being friends first might just be a good thing. The only problem facing them would be when Harvey found out about them and how he would react. She grimaced.

'Hey!'

Jumping, Roxie held her hand against her heart as she turned around to see who had wrapped their hands around her. 'Mitch! Do you actually want to give me a heart attack?'

'Ha-ha, that I definitely do not. It was worth it just to see your face, though.' Keeping his hands around her waist, Mitch kissed her on her neck.

'Umm, well, it won't be as much fun when I get you back.' Laughing, she batted him away and turned to face him. 'Are you ready for our picnic?'

'One hundred percent ready. I forgot to get lunch, so I'm absolutely starving.'

'You forgot to get lunch? How can you forget lunch?' She waited until he'd picked up the picnic basket before slipping her hand into his and leading the way towards the edge of the beach.

'Where is it we're going?'

'To a secret cove. Just around the cliff.' She nodded towards the sliver of sand they could see snaking around the bottom of the cliff.

'Perfect.'



‘YOU ACTUALLY REMEMBER that?’ Leaning forward, Roxie clutched her sides. She couldn’t remember the last time she had laughed so much.

‘Of course I remember. It’s not every day your best mate sneaks their pet hamster into school!’ Mitch chuckled. ‘I’ll never forget Mrs Halliday’s face when little Smudge ran across the carpet during story time.’

‘Oh yes. She jumped on the chair, didn’t she? And screamed at us all to climb onto the tables.’

‘I don’t remember you getting into trouble for it. If it’d have been me, I would have been hauled in front of the headteacher, but you seemed to get away with everything.’ Shaking his head, Mitch wiped tears of laughter from his eyes.

‘Ha, what can I say? I just have one of those angelic-looking faces.’ Roxie held her hand under her chin and tilted her head, smiling sweetly.

‘Until someone got to know you, that was. Weren’t you permanently in the detention room after school in secondary?’

‘Oh yes, I only had to sneeze in secondary school, and I’d get a detention.’ Looking across at him, she let her smile slip. ‘Do you think this is going to be weird? Because we were friends for so long?’

Leaning back on his elbows, Mitch looked at the ocean. ‘No, I don’t think so. It doesn’t feel at all weird or strange to me, anyway. You know I’ve always liked you like that, and this feels like a natural step.’

‘Well, no, I didn’t, actually. Not until you told me yesterday, anyway.’ She looked down at him and placed her picnic cup of fresh lemonade on the sand, twisting it so it wouldn’t fall. She ran her index finger across his jawline before leaning down and kissing him.

‘And that certainly didn’t feel weird.’ Sitting back up, he cupped her cheeks in his hands, gently pulling her towards him.

Closing her eyes, she breathed in the earthy aroma of his aftershave until his lips were against hers, warm and strong. Opening her eyes, she pulled slightly away from him, her expression serious. ‘What about Harvey?’

‘What about him?’ He dropped his hands to his lap.

‘Do you think that’s weird? That I was going to marry him?’ She ran her finger over the sand, drawing a circle around her cup.

‘I don’t really think about it all that much. It feels like a lifetime ago, to be honest. What about you?’

‘Same. It feels like a lifetime ago. I feel like a different person to the

woman who was about to marry him.’ she shuddered. How different would her life be now if he hadn’t cancelled it?

Mitch nodded, watching the trail Roxie was drawing on the sand.

Looking up at him, she shook her head and smiled. ‘Maybe we should just enjoy our time together down here. We can face everything else at a later date.’

‘I like that plan.’

‘It’s bound to be a bit messy, I guess, but we’ve got the time now to figure things out. To figure out what we both want.’

‘I agree. Let’s just enjoy the time we have now.’ Mitch nodded.

‘You said you’ve finished working with Harvey?’

‘I have indeed. I’ve branched out on my own. I’m setting up my own online business now.’ He grinned. ‘I get to choose the logo myself and everything. No more compromises.’

‘Ha-ha, and that’s the real reason you’ve finished working with him. You didn’t like the logo.’ Pointing at him, she grinned.

Chuckling, Mitch tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear. ‘You know how creative I am.’

‘Umm, I seem to remember you doing your utmost to get out of art class every week. Didn’t you once write a fake letter from your mum telling the teacher you’d broken your fingers?’

‘I did indeed. I spent the entire term with a bunch of toilet paper wrapped around my hand.’

‘That was it! I remember now. You used to let me sign your ‘cast’.’ She hooked her index fingers around the word ‘cast’.

‘that’s right. More times than not, the ink would soak through the paper, so I spent the rest of the day with a picture of a flower or a heart on my hand.’

‘You loved my drawings.’

‘You had talent. I’m sure you still do.’

Roxie shrugged. She hadn’t picked up a paintbrush since the fire. She didn’t really want to know if the scars had impaired her drawing technique or not.

‘You should help me design my logo. Rescue me from the pits of despair whenever I look at the thing.’

Roxie nodded. ‘Maybe I’ll give it a try.’ Throwing herself back against the sand, she looked up at the sky. The stars were bright and the moon full.

‘Wow.’

Lying next to her, Mitch brought his arm above her head.

Roxie lifted her head, lying back down on his outstretched arm and nestling into his shoulder. ‘it’s beautiful, isn’t it?’

‘It sure is.’

Roxie took a deep breath, relaxing her shoulders, and watched as a flock of seagulls flew towards the cliff behind them to roost.

Chapter Fifteen



‘And this is for a wedding next month?’ Roxie pulled the large cardboard mood board towards her.

‘That’s right. Ava and Pete’s wedding. They’re getting married in the church up the hill and then having the reception in Daisy and Ollie’s restaurant.’ Molly tucked a pen behind her ear.

‘Oh, lovely. I hadn’t realised they held wedding receptions there.’

‘Yes, it’s great because Daisy basically started the wedding planning side of Elsie’s business when she was a volunteer here. Wendy has been creating wedding cakes for a few years now, but it was when Daisy volunteered and Ollie needed help arranging his sister’s wedding that Elsie started offering the wedding planning service, so it’s really nice that Daisy still has a part to play in it.’

‘She and Ollie met here?’

‘Yes.’

Roxie nodded as she looked back at the mood board. ‘So, what do we need to plan for Ava and Pete’s wedding, then?’

‘Everything’s in place. Their theme is the ocean, which is why we have a lot of blues and greens. Wendy’s designed a cake covered in seahorses and the bride is having her earrings and necklace set with sea glass. I’m pretty sure she’s having sea glass featured in her tiara too.’ Molly pulled out a notebook from the shelf behind her and flicked through the pages before showing a photo of a beautiful delicate tiara, complete with the sea glass.

‘Wow, that’s stunning.’ Looking over the desk covered with magazine cut-outs, photos and illustrations, Roxie grinned. ‘It must be so much fun planning the weddings, working on them from scratch and watching a couple’s ideas come to life.’

‘It is. I love my job and am thankful to Elsie for employing me every single day.’ Molly smiled. ‘Each wedding is different, too. Even when a couple comes in asking for a very classic wedding day, after a couple of sessions of working with us, we figure out there’s at least one element they’re desperate for which makes their wedding unique.’

‘I bet. And everything is ready for the Beaton’s wedding next weekend?’

‘Yes. All we need to do now is to dress the hall. We’re lucky this time as The Fern hasn’t got another event booked the day before so we can have access to the hall for the whole day before the big day which means we won’t have a mad rush to get everything in place the night before and the morning of the wedding.’

‘Oh wow, is that what you usually do?’

Molly laughed. ‘Yes, sometimes we only have access to the venue the morning of the wedding. You should see the amount of coffee we drink in order to pull that off too!’

‘I can imagine.’ Roxie grimaced as her mobile pinged. ‘Sorry.’

‘No worries. Talking of coffee, I could do with one now. I’ll go and grab us one.’

‘Great, thanks.’ Roxie held her mobile to her ear. ‘Hi, Mitch.’

‘Hey, Roxie. I just wondered if you were still free to meet up this evening?’

‘Yes, definitely.’ Roxie grinned. Of course she was.

‘I was hoping you’d say that.’

‘Why?’ What was he up to?

‘Just meet me on the beach, at the end by the lighthouse at seven, okay?’

‘That’s very mysterious. What have you got planned?’ Roxie raised her eyebrows.

‘A...’ Mitch made a buzzing noise down the phone. ‘Sorry, the line.’

‘There’s nothing wrong with the line.’ Laughing, Roxie rolled her eyes. ‘Mitch?’

‘Bzzzzz... bye.’

Pulling her phone away from her ear, Roxie grinned. She supposed she’d have to wait until this evening to find out.



SINKING HER FEET INTO the damp, cool sand with every step she took, Roxie swung her trainers by her side. The evening was perfect. She could feel the sun’s warmth on her back as it hung low in the sky, ready to set for the night.

A handful of dog walkers were enjoying the spring evening too, their dogs running ahead of them, bounding after tennis balls or generally enjoying the vastness of the beach, clouds of sand churning beneath their paws. A group of teenagers ran in and out of the gentle waves, each daring the other to

stay in a little longer. A young family were building sandcastles near the seawall, determined that their creations would survive high tide.

She looked across at the lighthouse and frowned. She could see the silhouettes of a couple of people and what looked to be horses? Yes, they were horses and as she walked closer, she could see one of the people was Mitch, too.

No! That couldn't be her surprise date, could it? Horse riding? Roxie grinned as she quickened her pace.

'What do you think?' Coming towards her, Mitch indicated the horses behind him.

'We're going horse riding?'

'Yep.'

'Wow, I haven't ridden in years.' Reaching the horses, Roxie stroked the one closest to her, a beautiful chestnut mare with a white star between her eyes. 'You're beautiful.'

'Why, thank you.' Mitch chuckled. 'This is Star and Captain.'

'Ha-ha, the horses are gorgeous.' She pushed her hair back from her face. 'I can't believe we're actually going horse-riding! Along the beach! I've always wanted to do this.'

'I know. I remember you mentioning it once or twice.'

Looking across at him, Roxie smiled. She'd started riding lessons as a teenager and must have spoken about how riding along the beach was a dream of hers. He'd remembered.

'Oh, sorry.' Mitch reached into his pocket as his mobile sounded.

She watched as he stepped a metre or so away before turning to the woman holding the horses' reins. 'Are they used to riding on the sand?'

'Oh, yes. We come to ride along here often.' The woman smiled and held out her hand. 'I'm Mary.'

'Roxie. Thank you so much for this. This is like a dream come true.'

'You're very welcome.' Mary passed her a riding hat.

'Thanks.' Taking the hat, Roxie looked across at Mitch, who had joined them again. 'Everything okay?'

'Yes.' Mitch grimaced. 'It was Harvey. He's wanting to take Jen away for the weekend and asked me to look after their dog.'

'They've got a dog?' Roxie raised her eyebrows. Harvey had never made it a secret of his loathing of dogs.

‘Yes. Obviously, I told him I was busy.’ Mitch tightened her strap before putting on his own riding hat. ‘Shall we?’

‘We shall.’ Shaking all thoughts of Harvey away, Roxie grinned and pulled herself into the saddle.

‘Whoa!’

Roxie looked across at Mitch and stifled a laugh. ‘Are you okay there?’

‘Yep. All good.’ Mitch tried again to swing his leg over the saddle, Mary holding Captain steady by his rein. After the third go, Mitch landed heavily in the saddle and gripped hold of the reins, his knuckles turning white.

‘Have you not ridden since you came to that taster lesson when you were fourteen?’

‘Please don’t remind me how long ago that was.’ Mitch set his jaw as Captain took a slow step forward. ‘And by the way, the answer is no, I haven’t. I promised myself after being thrown from the horse that I would never ever get back on one and now here I am.’

‘Would you say thrown? If I remember correctly, the horse began to trot and you lost your balance.’ Roxie laughed before reaching out towards him and rubbing his hand. ‘I’m sorry. I shouldn’t tease. Put your trust in Captain, sit back, relax your shoulders and loosen your grip on the reins.’

‘I don’t want to loosen my grip.’ He swallowed.

‘Mitch, can I ask you something?’ She lowered her voice, forcing him to look at her, to concentrate.

‘Yes.’

‘Do you trust me?’

‘You know I do.’

‘Then relax. You’ve got this. Captain has got this. We’ll take it nice and slow. Ready?’ Roxie looked at him.

‘As ready as I’ll ever be.’

Roxie nodded as she watched him relax slightly. ‘Come on, Star.’ As Star began walking forwards, so did Captain and with each step Captain took, Roxie could see Mitch relax a little more.

‘This isn’t so bad.’

‘It’s not is it.’ Roxie grinned as encouraged Star to walk nearer the sea. The gentle waves lapping at Star’s ankles seemed to energise her, and she began to trot. Slowing back down to a walk, Roxie looked back at Mitch. ‘Do you fancy trying some trotting?’

‘I guess so.’ Mitch shook his head. ‘This will probably be my last time on a horse, so why not? Let’s give it a go.’

‘Great.’ Roxie gently tapped Star, and the horse began to trot. Looking down, Roxie grinned. She could see the water splashing up from Star’s hooves, the grains of sand spraying patterns on the surface. She looked across at Mitch. He was smiling. His knuckles were white again, his fingers clenched around the reins, but he was smiling. He was enjoying it, too.

‘This is fun.’ Mitch called across to her.

Nodding, Roxie looked ahead as they made their way across the beach. This was literally a dream come true. Why hadn’t she carried on with her riding? Or gone back to it after uni? She could feel that same buzz horse-riding had given her as an awkward teenager—freedom. And what made it even better was that not only was she able to share her dream with Mitch, but he was the one who had organised it for her too.

Chapter Sixteen



‘Afternoon, girls.’ Elsie tapped on the office door before walking inside. ‘I’ve brought you both something to eat before you leave for the hotel.’

‘Ooh, lovely. Thank you, Elsie.’ Molly cleared a space on the desk as Elsie lowered the tray.

‘You can get into the reception hall today to begin decorating it, is that right?’ Elsie plunged the cafetière and poured two mugs of coffee before topping them up with milk.

‘Yes, it’ll be lovely being able to pace ourselves for once.’ Molly took a sip of her coffee.

‘I can imagine. I’ve got Shona and her mum coming in this afternoon to have a look at the wedding cake, too. I’ve finished the base icing, so I’ll make a start on the detail before they come in.’ Elsie smiled.

‘Great. Can you let me know when they come, please? I just need to check Lindsey is happy with the choice of coffee. She wasn’t at all happy when we visited the hotel last and so we agreed she’d talk coffee choices over with Shona and Wayne and let us know, but we’ve not heard anything.’ Molly turned to Roxie. ‘Unless you have?’

‘Nope, nothing. Maybe as the day draws closer, she’s begun to realise it doesn’t really matter.’ Roxie pulled apart a freshly baked roll, drawing in a deep breath as the aroma hit her nostrils.

‘Maybe.’ Molly shrugged. ‘I hope so, at least. I’m not quite sure how happy The Fern will be if we go changing the choices this close to the wedding day.’ Molly picked up a roll, too.

‘Well, I’m sure whatever happens, it’ll come good in the end. I’ll let you two eat.’ Elsie grinned before closing the office door behind her.

Roxie spread a lump of butter across the roll and watched as it immediately melted, turning the bread yellow. ‘These smell delicious.’ Sinking her teeth into the roll, she swallowed. ‘They taste delicious too.’

‘Nothing beats freshly baked rolls. Especially Elsie’s.’

‘Yes. They taste different from other rolls.’ Pulling another roll apart, she looked inside. It was a lot airier than the rolls she normally bought from the

supermarket.

‘She bakes them in an old bread oven. The original one that was here when she bought the bakery.’

‘Oh, wow.’ Biting another roll, she let the taste linger in her mouth before swallowing.

‘I’d... sorry.’ Molly pushed away a notebook and picked up her mobile. ‘Hello? Yes, that’s right... Okay, I’ll be right there.’ Placing her half-eaten roll back on the plate, Molly stood up. ‘I’m really sorry, but that was Ava. She’s having a disaster with her wedding dresses. Apparently, the designer has sent the wrong one, and she’s now got to find another dress that will be ready before her wedding.’

‘Oh no, that’s awful. Can’t the designer just have the right dress sent?’

‘I don’t think so. There must be a reason, but Ava’s now panicking she won’t be able to find another dream wedding dress before her big day. Do you mind if I run over to her?’

‘Of course, you go. I’ll go and make a start on prepping the reception hall for the Beaton’s wedding, shall I?’

‘Is that okay? I feel really bad leaving you to do it. Remember, we’ve got tomorrow morning too, so don’t think you need to get it all done.’

‘Okay. All the details are in the notebook, aren’t they?’ Roxie began flicking through the notebook entitled *The Beaton’s Wedding*.

‘Yes, there’re notes and sketches showing how they want it too, but as I said, don’t worry if you don’t get it all done.’ Molly’s mobile began ringing again. ‘Sorry, it’s Ava again.’

‘No worries, you go. I’ll sort the hall out.’ Roxie tapped the notebook in front of her as Molly grabbed her coat.



DROPPING HER BAG AT her feet, Roxie looked around the vast hall, turning on her heels as she did so. It felt like an impossible task to transform this blank canvas into the wedding fairy-tale venue, but Molly and Wendy must have done it a dozen or so times before, so it must be possible.

She sank to the floor and crossed her legs before pulling the notebook from her bag. Looking from the sketches in the notebook and up to the hall again, she nodded. First things first, she needed to get the tables and chairs set out. Once they were in position, the hall would start looking like a wedding venture rather than a conference hall.

Pushing herself back to standing, she walked across to the tables. Each circular table was stacked upon another in the corner of the hall. This was going to be fun. Stretching her arms above her head, Roxie rolled her shoulders back. She could do this.

She gripped hold of the edge of the table and, as she stepped back, she twisted her arms before jumping away. She watched as the table landed upside down on the floor with a resounding clatter. Huh, now all she had to do was to flip it over. How hard could that be?

Roxie used all her body weight to twist the table into a standing position and then began dragging it across the floor. One done, only another twenty-four to go.

Twisting the table an inch to one side, she turned as the door opened. 'Mitch! How did you know I was in here?'

'I didn't. I was walking past to go and get some lunch and heard an almighty bang and thought I'd come to check everyone was okay. What are you doing here? Are you all right?' Letting the door swing shut behind him, Mitch walked in, his hands on his hips, looking around.

'I'm making a start at setting up for the Beaton's wedding. Only Molly has been called away on a wedding dress emergency and I need to move the tables.' She indicated the stack of tables in the corner.

'So, you decided to make a start by moving the heaviest things n here, the tables, rather than wait for Molly?' A slow smile spread across his face.

Roxie shrugged. 'Well, yes, in hindsight, maybe I should have started with something else.'

'Do you want a hand?'

'Aren't you supposed to be working on your business?'

'If you don't want any help, I'll go.' He turned slowly.

'Hey, no, a hand would be great! Thanks.' Laughing, Roxie walked across to him, drawing him into a hug.

Chapter Seventeen



‘This could definitely pass as a veil. Are you sure it’s not the veil?’ Mitch held the long voile over his head and began strutting around the hall.

‘Ha-ha, it could. Or perhaps it’s the missing wedding dress?’ Picking up another voile, she shook it out and draped it around her body.

‘Umm, that could totally pass as a wedding dress.’ Chuckling, Mitch took the voile off his head and held it up over the dark curtains before looking around the vast room. ‘And every window in here needs to be draped?’

‘Yep.’ Folding up the voile she was holding, Roxie laid it back on the pile. ‘It might take some time.’

‘It just might.’

Roxie grimaced. ‘Although, look what a difference having the tables and chairs in position has made. When the voiles are up, it will look like a proper wedding reception.’

‘True. How long did you say we had to get it all done? A year tomorrow?’ He raised his eyebrows.

‘No! It won’t take long. Come on, let’s make a start.’ Roxie positioned the ladder she’d borrowed from a member of staff and began climbing up it.

‘Careful.’

Rolling her eyes, Roxie laughed. ‘I’ll be fine. Are you going to pass me one of those or just stand there watching?’

‘Well, standing here watching sounds like a fun idea.’ Mitch folded his arms.

‘Oi! Come on, pass me one!’ Shaking her head, Roxie held out her hand.

‘Here you go.’

Taking the voile, she wrapped and draped it over the top of the curtains so that it hung down in a large swoop. ‘How does that look?’

‘Good. It looks good.’ Mitch nodded.

‘Great. That wasn’t so hard.’ Stepping down from the ladder, she swooshed the voile from side to side until she was happy it was in the right position.



‘YOU MADE IT LOOK EASY.’ Mitch leaned out towards the curtain, tugging at the voile, the ladder teetering beneath him.

‘Careful. I don’t think the bride’s mother will thank you for splattering blood over them if you fall.’

‘Thanks! As long as the voiles are okay, hey?’ Mitch chuckled.

‘Ha-ha, exactly!’ Roxie grinned. She was glad Mitch was helping. Apart from the fact she’d have probably still been dragging the tables into position if he hadn’t, she was having fun. Mitch had a knack for turning even the dullest jobs into something fun. Not that setting up for the wedding was dull. It wasn’t anything of the sort, but as teenagers he’d join her on her newspaper round, turning a miserable weekend morning task into something to look forward to. She smiled. Come rain or shine, he’d always waited for her down the alleyway next to the newsagents where she picked up her papers from, ready and willing to help, always refusing a cut of the measly three-pound odd she had been paid for three hours of work.

‘How’s this?’

‘Just a tad to the left.’ Even when she and Harvey had been together, it had been Mitch she’d turned to when she’d had an argument with Harvey, Mitch she’d looked for to lighten the mood, to take her mind off whatever drama was now unfolding at home. She looked up at him hanging the voile and frowned. Why hadn’t she seen Mitch back then as she did now? If she and Mitch had got together when they had been younger, before Harvey, it would have saved them both a lot of heartache.

‘You look very serious.’ Mitch looked down at her, the ladder shifting beneath him.

‘Whoa, careful!’ Darting her arm out, Roxie grabbed the ladder, steadying it. ‘I may joke about not wanting the voiles spoilt, but I’m being serious about you being careful. I’m not sure if Bruno would make the trip to the hospital. Not again.’

‘Ah, Bruno. You’ve still got your faithful old rust bucket.’ Mitch grinned.

‘Oi! Don’t call him a rust bucket. He’s a perfectly good car, thank you very much.’ She sighed. ‘Although I do need to find a garage before I head home.’

‘Not that great, then. I think Scott, Olivia’s partner, said he was a mechanic. Why don’t you drop Bruno...’ Mitch looked down at her.

Roxie frowned as his words hung in the air. What was the matter? Turning her head, she realised her sleeve had rolled down. Yanking her hand

away from the ladder, she pulled her sleeve down, covering her arm again, a deep crimson flooding across her face.

‘Hey, Roxie. You don’t need to cover it up.’ Stepping down from the ladder, Mitch paused in front of her. ‘You don’t need to hide anything from me.’

Swallowing, she averted his gaze.

‘Roxie.’ Gently tucking his finger beneath her chin, he turned her to face him.

She focused her eyes behind him, at the voile hanging awkwardly to one side.

‘Roxie.’

Taking a deep breath, she looked him in the eyes. All she could see was love and kindness, nothing else. Not what she’d been fearing.

‘You don’t need to hide anything from me. Your scar shows me how much you care. It shows the world how brave you are.’

Swallowing, she slowly pulled up her sleeve to reveal her arm. She’d had her arm tattooed in the hope of covering it and it had, to some extent but when she looked at it, instead of birds swooping on a water-coloured background all she could see was the thickened skin, a reminder of that night, a reminder of what could have been, the night Harvey and her relationship began to break apart.

‘Strength.’

‘Huh?’

‘Strength, that’s what I see when I look at it. May I?’ He nodded to her arm; his fingers poised, ready to touch.

She nodded, despite her natural urge to recoil from his touch. She closed her eyes as he ran his fingers gently across her skin, his touch light, careful.

‘You’re beautiful.’

Opening her eyes, she looked at him, her eyebrows raised.

‘You are. All of you.’ Bending his head, he kissed her scar. ‘You’re strong, fearless, and beautiful.’

‘Fearless. Coming from the man who was petrified to trot along the beach? You don’t hold a very high bar.’ She laughed, tears pricking the inside of her eyes.

‘I’m being serious. You are.’

‘I just did what anyone else would have done.’ She shrugged. She hadn’t had a choice.

‘No, no, you didn’t.’ Taking her hands, he placed them around his shoulders, drawing her in for a hug, burying his head in the side of her neck. ‘You don’t have to hide anything from me.’

Nodding, Roxie wrapped her arms around him. ‘We should finish hanging these voiles.’

‘We should. After that, though, we should get something to eat. I’m absolutely starving.’

Roxie laughed. ‘Of course, you never did get your lunch, did you?’

Chapter Eighteen



‘Are you sure this goes here? It kind of looks a bit wobbly.’ Looking at the wooden dancefloor they’d spent the past hour trying to lay, she tilted her head.

‘Umm, no, I don’t think it does. I literally have no idea.’ Mitch chuckled as stood up.

‘And there’re definitely no instructions?’

‘I didn’t look.’

‘Okay, let’s check.’ Roxie rummaged through the huge box. Bingo! There was some. She held the booklet in the air. ‘This may help!’

‘Ooh, that might.’ Taking the booklet, Mitch crouched on the floor and began flicking through the thick document. ‘I think I know where we’ve been going wrong.’

‘I hope so.’ Stretching her arms up high, Roxie yawned. Today had been a long day. Fun but long. She could feel muscles she’d forgotten she had and her toe was throbbing from the wooden dancefloor piece she’d dropped on her foot about two hours ago when they’d begun laying it.

‘Are you okay?’

She covered her mouth as she yawned again. ‘Just tired.’

‘Did you want to head back to the bakery, and I’ll finish up here?’ He nodded towards the pieces of dance floor.

‘Nope. Thank you, but hopefully, it won’t take too long now we have the instructions. Besides, the more we can get done today, the less we’ll have to do tomorrow.’

‘Oh, am I being roped into helping tomorrow too?’ He raised his eyebrows, his mouth twitching at the corners.

‘I meant the less me and Molly will have to do but, hey, if you’re offering, I won’t turn you down. Although I have to warn you, it’s going to be an early start. We’ve got to finish setting it up before the wedding and the wedding is at three.’ She grinned.

‘Ha-ha, I’m happy to help. More than happy if it means spending some more time with you.’

‘Aw, thank you. It’s been fun today, hasn’t it?’

‘It sure has.’ He grinned.

Walking across to him, she wrapped her arms around his shoulders before leaning down and kissing him on the head and leaning her head on his back.

Standing up, he twisted in her embrace, hugging her back. ‘Did you want to grab us some coffee to help us through the last of it?’

‘Now that’s a good idea.’ Nodding, she leaned forward and pecked him on the lips before walking across the hall.



PLACING THE TWO COFFEE mugs on a table, she pulled out her mobile and glanced at it before answering. ‘Hi, Molly.’

‘Hi, how’s it going? I’m so sorry I’ve not been able to come up. I’ve literally been traipsing around every wedding boutique in a fifty-mile radius of Trestow.’

‘Oh no, did Ava find a new dress?’ Picking up a coffee mug, Roxie took a quick sip, the flavour a bittersweet explosion in her mouth. That was good coffee.

‘Yes, in the end. After spending the day trying on all dresses available at short notice, we went back to the first shop and Ava fell in love with the first dress she’d tried on today.’ Molly laughed.

‘What a pain!’

‘I’m just happy that she’s found one. I was really worried that she wouldn’t. Anyway, how did the setting up at The Fern go? Were you able to get much done? Don’t worry if you haven’t. A lot really needs two people to do.’

‘Mitch popped by, so I roped him into helping. We’ve got the tables and chairs set up, the voiles hung and we’re just trying to figure out how to lay the dancefloor.’

‘Wow, it sounds as though you’ve got loads done. don’t worry about the dancefloor. Someone from the hotel will put that together tomorrow morning. Sorry, I should have said.’

‘Oh, that’s a relief. We’ve spent ages trying to figure it out.’ Roxie laughed.

‘Thanks for doing all of that. It sounds as though we’ll only have decorated the tables left and a few other bits and pieces. We’ll get those easily done before the wedding tomorrow.’ Molly yawned.

‘You’ll start me off again.’ Roxie stifled a yawn.

‘Sorry! I’ll see you tomorrow.’

‘Yes, bye.’ Sliding her mobile back into her pocket, Roxie picked up the coffee mugs again. Now she knew the dancefloor would be taken care of tomorrow, they could enjoy their coffees before she headed back to the bakery. An early night was definitely calling her.

She pushed open the door to the hall with her shoulder, trying desperately not to spill any coffee. Pausing, she frowned. The hall had been plunged into darkness; the lights were off and only slivers of moonlight streamed through the windows, illuminating an elongated rectangle beneath each window.

‘Mitch?’

As soon as she’d spoken, the dance floor lit up, a kaleidoscope of coloured lights before dimming to a pale purple haze.

‘Will you do me the honour of joining me for a dance?’

With her eyes now used to the dim light, she spotted Mitch standing in the middle of the dancefloor, his arm held out towards her. Grinning, she placed the mugs on the table nearest her before walking across the hall. As she stepped onto the dancefloor, Mitch hit a button on his phone before placing it on a table and standing in the centre of the now-completed dancefloor again, the slow beats of a ballad filling the room. Joining him, she placed her hands in his, letting him lead her in time to the music.

Looking up at him, she smiled. These past few days had been a whirlwind, the best dates she had ever experienced, with the best friends she’d ever had. Why hadn’t she seen what was right in front of her before? Leaning up, she kissed him, her lips against his. It felt so right; they felt so right. Why had it taken so many years for him to admit his true feelings towards her? For her to see and understand her feelings towards him?

Chapter Nineteen



Roxie opened her eyes before rolling over and snoozing her alarm clock. It was 6am. She groaned. After getting in late, Elsie had insisted she didn't get up for the morning's baking, but it still felt early. She needed to meet Molly at the hotel in an hour in order to get everything prepared for Shona and Wayne's wedding and before that, she needed to shower and pack the decorations from the office into her car.

She yawned and pushed herself to sitting. Molly would probably already be at the florist collecting the table centres, bouquets, and buttonholes. Yes, she really should get up. Picking up her mobile, she glanced at the screen, hoping Mitch had sent his morning message. Nothing. It was still early though, and she didn't blame him if he'd slept in after helping all day yesterday.

Elsie's voice followed a tap on the door. 'Roxie, lovely. I've made you a coffee if you want one.'

Grinning, Roxie slipped out of bed and opened the door, taking the hot mug in her hands. 'Thank you. This is just what I need.'

'You're welcome, love. I know how busy your day is likely to be today.' Elsie smiled.

'Yes, I feel as though we've got so much to do. I can't imagine how Shona's feeling.' Taking a sip of her coffee, she closed her eyes. It was just what she needed.

'Oh, I'm sure she's just fine. She'll be too giddy with emotion right now to feel any tiredness.' Elise smiled.

'Did they like the cake? Shona and Lindsey? Sorry, I didn't ask last night.'

'Yes, they did. Thankfully. I was half expecting to have to redo the whole thing after hearing what you and Molly were saying about Lindsey, but she seemed to like it. They both did. To say I was relieved was an understatement.' Elsie chuckled. 'Right, I'll leave you to get ready. Breakfast is waiting downstairs.'

'Thank you.' Watching Elsie walk back downstairs, Roxie closed the bedroom door before walking across to the window and drawing the curtains

wide. The sun was shining, and it was promising to be a warm day. Drinking her coffee, she watched the fishing boats coming in and eager dog walkers intent on wearing out their dogs before the rush to work.

She smiled. This was idyllic, waking up to this each morning. Downing the last of her coffee, she took a final look across at the beach before closing the curtains and turning to get ready for the day ahead.



‘DOES THIS LOOK OKAY here?’ Roxie moved the table centre a millimetre to the right.

‘Yes, it looks perfect.’ Molly smiled before turning back to the large archway she was carefully decorating with fresh cream roses.

‘It’s surreal to think that Shona and Wayne’s lives are going to be transformed forever today and that we’ve had a small part to play in it all.’ Roxie picked up another table centre and walked to the next table.

‘It is crazy.’ Molly grinned. ‘It’s one of the things that I love about this job. The bride and groom might not remember us, but they’ll remember all of this.’ Molly indicated the decorations. Molly’s phone rang. ‘Sorry, are you okay taking these please?’ she held up the roses she’d begun threading through the arch.

‘Yep. Of course.’ Laying the table centre down, Roxie took the roses from Molly and continued to thread them through. The arch was going to look stunning when it was complete. She glanced out of the window. She’d half-expected Mitch to turn up to help. He’d said he would. She shook her head. He had other things to do. He had a business to prepare, to launch.

‘That was Lindsey.’ Molly held up her mobile. ‘She was ringing to check how things were going here.’

Roxie grimaced as she picked up another rose. ‘Let’s just hope everything meets her standards when they arrive for the wedding breakfast.’

‘Oh, she also said she’s going to pop up to give us a hand in an hour or two.’

‘Seriously? Won’t she be busy getting ready with Shona?’

Molly shrugged. ‘If it lets her relax and enjoy the day better afterwards...’

‘That’s true.’ Roxie nodded. Yes, it was. If it meant Lindsey could relax knowing everything was taken care of, then why did it matter if wanted to check in on them?

‘Here, I’ll give you a hand now.’ Putting her mobile away, Molly joined Roxie.

‘Molly, Roxie.’ The hall door opened, and Diane stood in the doorway. ‘Wow, this looks gorgeous! I can’t believe how different it looks.’

‘Hi, Diane. Thanks.’

‘It looks like something straight out of a fairy tale.’ Walking to the middle of the hall, Diane turned slowly in a circle.

‘Cheers. What brings you here?’ Molly grinned.

‘Oh, Elsie asked me to pop this by.’ She lifted up a small basket. ‘Lunch for you both. She was worrying that you wouldn’t have time to eat before the wedding began.’

‘Aw, that’s lovely of her. Thank you.’ Laying the roses down, Molly walked towards Diane before taking the basket and peering inside. ‘Ooh freshly baked rolls and cheese.’

‘Yum. Are they the same rolls as yesterday?’ Roxie licked her lips.

‘Yep.’ Grinning, Molly carefully rolled back a tablecloth and began taking the food out.

‘Right, well, I’ll leave you both to it. Good luck for the rest of the day.’ Diane waved before heading back out.

‘Thanks.’ Roxie pulled her mobile from her pocket. No messages, no calls. She frowned. Mitch had been so happy yesterday and yet he hadn’t answered her texts today. What was going on?

‘Are you okay?’ Molly passed her a roll.

‘I think so. I don’t know. Mitch hasn’t been in contact today.’

‘Maybe he’s just got caught up with something. I’m sure there’s a logical explanation.’

‘Yes, you’re probably right.’ Roxie pulled her cardigan sleeve lower over her hand.

Chapter Twenty



‘Don’t they look cute together?’ Molly whispered from the back of the crowd of people gathered around the dancefloor.

Standing on her tiptoes, Roxie caught a glimpse of Shona and Wayne and they moved across the dancefloor, owning their first dance as though they’d been practising for years. ‘They do.’ She looked around the hall. Some two hundred people had turned up to wish Shona and Wayne good wishes in their married life. Turning towards the wall, she pulled her mobile from the small handbag hanging from her shoulder. Still nothing from Mitch.

‘Still no message?’

‘Nope. Nothing.’ Slipping her mobile away again, she tugged at the high neck of the blue dress she’d borrowed from Molly. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d worn a dress, but in the absence of a nice shirt and trousers, a dress and cardigan were the best she could offer.

‘I’m sure it’s all okay.’ Molly touched her forearm as people propelled onto the dancefloor, the first dance officially over.

Glancing up, she shook her head as someone asked her to dance, excusing herself to the back of the room. ‘Sorry.’ Looking out of the window, it surprised her to realise it was still light outside. It had been such a long day preparing the hall and then hanging around in the background to make sure everything ran smoothly that she’d fully expected to see the pitch black of night-time outside. Was that Mitch? Yes.

Holding her hand up to wave, Roxie paused. He was with someone. The way he was turning around and talking, there was definitely someone there. A woman. She frowned. Mitch hadn’t mentioned meeting anyone today. He’s offered to help and then not turned up. Who was she?

Roxie bent down and pulled the high heels Molly had lent her off before slipping outside. Maybe the woman was a business partner? Or someone who was helping Mitch with his business? Whoever she was, she knew they’d be a logical explanation. It wasn’t as though she was worried about Mitch seeing someone behind her back. He wasn’t like that. Still, now she’d spotted him, she might as well catch up with him, check everything’s okay.

‘Mitch.’ Letting the door close behind her, she stepped into the sunshine and held her hand above her head, waving.

Mitch paused; his eyes wide. Just as she expected a deer in the headlights to look. Frozen to the spot.

Why was he looking at her like that? As though she was the last person in the world he wanted to see at the moment. Taking a step forward, she froze as another person joined Mitch and the woman. This time a man. A man she recognised. A man she’d spent years being in a relationship with. A man she’d been close to marrying. Harvey. She watched as Harvey paused and turned, looking straight at her.

‘Roxie?’

‘Uh-huh.’

‘You’re wearing a dress.’

She tugged at the neckline again. Was that all he had to say? After years of ignoring her very existence, that was all he had to say to her.

‘Roxie? The Roxie? The Roxie who rescued Harvey?’ The woman turned and smiled, her smile welcoming and friendly.

Roxie blinked. The woman must be Jen, Harvey’s fiancée, but what were they doing here and why hadn’t Mitch warned her? He could have picked up his phone, sent her a message, morse code, anything. She looked across at Mitch, who was standing, his eyes on her. He obviously hadn’t told Harvey they’d been dating then. Shaking her head, she smiled at the woman in front of her. ‘Jen? Right. Lovely to meet you.’

‘Yes, that’s right. I’m so pleased to have finally met you. I’ve heard so much about you from Mitch and Harvey’s family.’

Not from Harvey himself then. Roxie nodded. ‘Have you come to visit Mitch?’

‘No, yes. I guess so. He mentioned to Harvey where he was staying and how much of a good time he was having, how beautiful it was around this area and so we decided to come down here, too.’ Jen took a step closer to Roxie and lowered her voice. ‘They’ve not particularly seen much of each other recently, so I was rather hoping this would give them a chance to work things out. I plan to hit the spa tomorrow and give them some brotherly time together.’

‘Right.’ Roxie nodded.

‘Did you know Roxie was here, Mitch?’ Jen called over her shoulder to him.

‘Uh...’

‘We ran into each other a couple of days ago.’ Roxie shrugged. It wasn’t a lie.

‘Oh lovely. I do wish you’d mentioned it and I’d have brought Roxie a gift.’ Jen tapped Roxie on the arm. ‘Never mind. You’ll join us for dinner, won’t you? I’d love to get to know you a little better.’

Roxie looked from Jen to Mitch, to Harvey, and back again. She wasn’t sure which of the brothers looked more awkward. ‘I’d love to, but I’m working all evening.’ She signalled in the direction of the hall and the music seeping into the grounds. ‘In fact, I should get back.’

‘Oh, that’s a real shame. It was so good to meet you.’ Jen looked across at Harvey. ‘Wasn’t it lovely to run into Roxie?’

Standing still, Harvey nodded his head a fraction.

‘Nice to meet you, too. Bye.’ Turning, Roxie walked as quickly as she could back towards the hall before pulling the door open and shutting it firmly behind her. What had just happened? Had she been dreaming? She shook her head. It had more correctly been the stuff of nightmares.

Pulling her mobile from her handbag, she quickly messaged Mitch.

A little warning would have been nice! Xxx

She took a deep breath, breathing out slowly. It wasn’t Mitch’s fault. By the looks of things, their visit had been a surprise to him, too.

‘Hey, Roxie. It’s time for the cake cutting! Can you take a couple of snaps for the office, please, while I wait with the serving plates?’ Molly signalled for Roxie to join her.

‘Yes, yes, of course.’ Plastering a smile on her face, Roxie glanced at a message from Mitch before switching her phone to camera mode.

Sorry. Didn’t know what to say xxx

Chapter Twenty One



‘Now that’s what you call a long day.’ Roxie slumped onto a chair, one tablecloth hung over her arm and another two scrunched in her lap.

‘You’re telling me. I didn’t think those last guests were ever going to leave.’ Sitting in the chair next to her, Molly yawned.

‘Me neither.’ Roxie stifled a yawn and laughed. ‘You’re making me start now.’

‘Shall we just come back tomorrow morning and tidy up? I don’t think my eyes can stay open a moment longer.’

‘I was hoping you’d say that.’ Roxie stood up and bundled the tablecloths onto the table next to her.

‘Thanks for stepping in and covering Wendy. There’s no way I could have coped on my own.’ Molly linked arms with Roxie.

‘You’re very welcome. It’s been fun.’ Roxie looked down at their linked arms, at her high heels dangling from her other hand and laughed. ‘I feel as though we’ve been out clubbing all night.’

‘Ha-ha, yes. Minus the alcohol, of course.’ Molly giggled before covering her mouth and yawning again. ‘Aw, I really do need my bed.’

‘Hold on.’ Pausing, Roxie unlinked arms and checked her handbag. ‘I’ve left my phone. You go ahead. I’ll see you in the morning.’

‘Are you sure? Don’t you want me to wait for you?’ Molly frowned.

‘No, don’t worry. I must have bundled it in with the tablecloths, that’s all. It won’t take me a moment to find it. You get off.’

‘Okay, night.’ Molly waved before opening the hall door.

Striding back to the table they’d been slumped at, Roxie shook out the tablecloths. Nope, it wasn’t here. She rechecked her handbag again, but there was nothing but a business card one of the band members had insisted on giving to her in case another couple wanted to book them for their wedding.

She looked around the vast room. Where could it be? She last had it when she’d been taking photographs of the happy couple cutting the wedding cake. She didn’t remember when she had it last after that. The rest of the evening

had been such a blur. She hadn't even had the time to fully process running into Harvey and Jen.

'Roxie? You're still here. I was hoping to catch you.'

'Mitch.' Turning, she watched as Mitch let the door swing shut behind him before walking towards her, pausing a few metres away.

'I'm so sorry. You're right, I should have warned you. When I mentioned where I was staying, it was never my intention that they came here.'

'I know.' She nodded. 'Jen seems nice.'

'She is. She's good for him.' He glanced behind him. 'Not that you weren't good for him. I didn't mean that.'

'Hey, you really don't have to explain.' She shifted her feet. They still hurt from wearing high heels all day.

'Right. Of course. Are we...' He signalled between them. 'You know... are we okay?'

'Yes, I hope so.' Grinning, she walked towards him before sinking into his arms.

'Good, I was hoping you'd say that.' He kissed her on top of the head before gently lifting her chin towards him and kissing her on the lips.

A bang sounded from behind them and, turning, Roxie spotted the door closing. 'Huh, I wonder who that was.'

Mitch shrugged before widening his eyes. 'Harvey?' Running across to the door, he pulled it open, looking one way and then the other.

'Was it him?' Ducking her head under his arm, she peered out of the door. Sure enough, she caught a glimpse of him before he turned the corner.

'Yep.' Letting the door fall shut, Mitch rubbed his hand over his stubble. 'I'm sorry. I need to go and speak to him.'

'I understand.' Roxie nodded before running her index finger across his lips. 'We're okay though?'

'Always.' He smiled at her before slipping out of the door again, leaving Roxie alone in the huge hall.

Slumping her shoulders, she walked back to the group of tables. The sooner she could find her phone and get back to Elsie's, the better.

Chapter Twenty Two



‘Ugh, I’d forgotten how bad this looked.’ Molly threw her bag onto the closest table.

Letting the hall door swing shut behind her, Roxie sighed. ‘Oh, yes. Me too.’ She closed her eyes tight, hoping the wine-stained tablecloths, the abandoned table centres and the arch, now misshapen with drooping petals, would disappear. No such luck. ‘On the bright side, I guess it means everyone had a good time.’

‘That’s very true and the drunken photos on social media are more proof of that.’ Molly began collecting the table centres.

Roxie looked down at the tablecloth as she bundled it up, the telltale purple stains from red wine and the odd drip of wax from the candles. ‘I guess Lindsey needn’t have worried so much about the shade of tablecloths.’

Molly giggled. ‘No. look at the state of them!’

‘I don’t think I can see even a smidgen of cream on this one.’ Roxie laughed. ‘Yuck, I’m so so tired.’

‘Same here. You know what this calls for, don’t you?’

‘Coffee?’ Roxie raised her eyebrows hopefully.

‘Coffee and cake!’ Grabbing her bag, Molly pushed open the hall door. ‘I won’t be long.’

‘Great. Thank you.’ Roxie smiled. If there was anything better than coffee after hardly any sleep, then it was coffee and cake. She bundled up another tablecloth as something dropped to the floor with a tinkle. Bending down, she looked under the table. It was an earring. An earring with an unusually large diamond. That must have been one of Lindsey’s. Reaching underneath, she closed her hand around the earring.

‘I thought I’d find you here.’

‘Ouch.’ Jerking her head up, Roxie winced as she hit it against the underside of the table. ‘Harvey?’

‘Roxie.’

Standing up, she placed the earring on the table and rubbed the top of her head. What was she supposed to say to him? he’d spent years avoiding her and now he was standing right in front of her. ‘How are you?’

‘I want to talk about Mitch.’

‘Right. Okay.’ She swallowed. Mitch hadn’t been able to catch Harvey up yesterday after he’d spotted her and Mitch kissing. Had he spoken to him this morning?

‘I don’t want you seeing him anymore.’

‘Pardon?’ she spluttered.

‘Just that. Drop him. Don’t contact him again.’

‘What? Why?’

‘Because he’s my brother.’

‘So? You finished with me years ago. Besides, you’re with Jen now. You’re about to get married.’

‘Don’t flatter yourself. This isn’t about you. It’s about Mitch.’ Harvey sank his hands into his pockets.

‘I don’t understand. What has it got to do with you? Why wouldn’t you want him to be happy?’ She searched his eyes. There wasn’t even a flicker of emotion.

‘He’s my brother. I’ve worked hard to forget about... what happened. I don’t need you coming into our lives and being a constant reminder.’

‘Harvey, you didn’t read my letter, did you? Of course you didn’t, Mitch told me. Well, if you had, you’d know I don’t hold a grudge against you or anything. I moved on.’

Rocking on his feet, he looked at the floor before meeting her gaze. ‘Good for you.’

Roxie ran her fingers through her hair, suddenly wishing she’d run a brush through it after she’d showered that morning, not to look good for him but just so she didn’t feel the piercing pain of hair being pulled from her scalp as she fought her fingers free. ‘Mitch and I have nothing to do with you.’

Shaking his head slowly, Harvey laughed a low, hollow laugh. ‘I guess that’s how much family means to him, then. I knew he was distancing himself; I had no idea it was because he was seeing you.’

‘What? No. We’ve only just started dating.’ She bit her lip; she wasn’t about to tell him Mitch had been distancing himself because he didn’t approve of the way Harvey had treated her. No, that wouldn’t help anyone, least of all Mitch.

Harvey nodded, neither giving away whether or not he believed her. ‘I guess he’s made his decision then.’

‘No, why does he have to choose between us, Harvey? He’s your brother and he always will be.’

‘Then you’ve made yours. Thank you.’ Turning on his heels, Harvey left the hall, the room filling with silence behind him.

Sinking into a chair, Roxie covered her face with her hands. What had he meant, that she’d made the decision? Was she supposed to step back from Mitch now? That’s what he wanted, wasn’t it? Well, she wouldn’t. Mitch deserved happiness too, so did she. She wouldn’t stand by and let Harvey dictate who they could or couldn’t date. It wasn’t right.

Hearing a message ping, she pulled her phone towards her. It was Mitch.

I still haven’t been able to find Harvey. I can’t believe he spotted us. I should have spoken to him about us earlier. Hope I haven’t messed things up between us. Whatever he’s done, he’s still my brother xxx

Roxie swallowed. Mitch was right. Harvey was his brother. Always had been and always would be. And family did come first. It had to. Who was she to come between two brothers?

She pulled a disused napkin towards her and picked up an abandoned lipstick before scrawling a short note to Molly.

Really sorry. Had to leave. Can you ask Elsie to pack up my things and send them to my home, please? Thanks. Sorry x

Standing up, she tucked the chair beneath the table and left the hall.

Chapter Twenty Three



Wiping her eyes, she kept her eyes focused on the road in front of her. She felt awful leaving Molly to clear up the hall. She felt awful leaving Elsie in the lurch. But what else could she do? She couldn't stay there. She couldn't carry on seeing Mitch. He wanted his brother back. He deserved to sort things out with Harvey, but as long as she was there, coming between them, that would never happen.

And she couldn't stay in the bay knowing that Mitch was at The Fern, just a few miles away. She couldn't cope with that. What she could do, though, was to go back home, go back to work and carry on with life as though this volunteering holiday and her brief but perfect relationship with Mitch had never happened. That she could do.

She slammed the brake son as a deer ran in front of the car, pulling the steering wheel to the left sharply. A loud thud sounded, and she groaned, her eyes welling up. Had she hit it? She must have hit the deer.

Fumbling with her seatbelt, she climbed out of the car and ran around the front, fear gripping her chest. She glanced up to her right as a loud rustling sounded and watched the leaves shudder as the deer disappeared into the woods.

She looked back at the car. It had been a fencepost she'd hit. Just a fence post. A strangled laugh escaped her lungs, and she pinched the bridge of her nose. It was just a fence post. She knelt down next to Bruno. The fence post had crumpled the left headlight. She shrugged. She'd have to book a garage appointment when she got home.

Slipping back behind the wheel, she turned the ignition. Nothing. She tried again, pressing down on the accelerator. Finally, Bruno grumbled to life before letting out an almighty bang, followed by silence.

Great. She should have booked Bruno into the garage while she was in the bay. She'd meant to. She'd meant to ring Olivia's partner, Scott.

Pulling her phone from her pocket, she took the garage's business card Olivia had given her and punched in the number. She'd get Bruno picked up safely and then book a cab to another town, find a hotel for a couple of days until Scott had worked his magic.

‘Hi, I’ve broken down.’



SHE GLANCED AT HER mobile as yet another message from Mitch illuminated the screen. He was asking if she was okay, if they could talk. How was she supposed to answer? If she told him that Harvey had spoken to her, then that would only push them further apart. If she didn’t, then what other reason did she give for running off as she had?

Throwing her mobile on the back seat, she leaned her elbows on the steering wheel and looked outside. It had begun raining, the warm large raindrops of Spring. She sank her head into her arms and closed her eyes. Why had she let herself fall so deeply for Mitch? How had they ever thought a relationship together could actually work? What would they have done at Christmas, birthdays, family celebrations? All sat round the table laughing and joking together? Pretending the history between her and Harvey didn’t exist?

She laughed, her voice high-pitched. She should never have fallen for him. She should never have believed it could work. There was too much history. Far too much history.

She looked towards the gap in the trees the deer had disappeared through. She hadn’t hit the deer, had she? She knew she’d hit the fencepost, but she hadn’t scraped the deer or nudged it before she’d hit the fencepost, had she? Sitting back, she rubbed her eyes. She couldn’t be sure. Not one hundred percent.

Stepping out of the car, she shut the door behind her and quickly crossed the road, dipping beneath the overhanging branches and into the shelter of the trees. She’d just go and check. If she had hit the deer, it wouldn’t have got far. At least that way she wouldn’t have it pressed on her conscience.

As she walked deeper and deeper into the woods, the rain ceased and a blanket of silence surrounded her. Each time she stepped and disturbed the undergrowth, a warm, earthy aroma surrounded her.

She’d missed Mitch. His absence over the last couple of years had been a gaping hole in her life and she could only imagine that hole will have grown now. She’d sampled the life she could have had with him, being his partner, and now she’d had it ripped from her grasp. Mitch. He was no longer her Mitch. Not her partner, not her friend. Things would never be the same again. Not now.

Pausing, she looked around. The deer wasn't here. It had long since gone. Ran off after the scare, after the near miss. That was a good thing. It meant that she hadn't knocked it.

Turning around, she began walking through the trees, back the way she'd come. Or was it? Had she come that way? Or that way? She'd lost any notion of direction she'd had since wandering through the trees.

She stopped and looked up at the sky. She could just about make out the sun through the canopy of leaves and branches above her. What was that rule? The sun set in the West? Or rose in the West? The North? She had no idea. Not that it mattered what the rule was, not when the sun was so high in the sky as it was at the moment.

Closing her eyes, she took a deep breath in, trying to calm herself. The woods wouldn't be that big. Not here. They couldn't be. She'd not long driven through a village. Now, if she could just work out in which direction the village was in, she'd be able to walk that way, even if she couldn't work out which way the road was. She could walk to the village, find the main road and come back out again. Find Bruno in a roundabout way.

She spun around, looking around. The trees all looked the same. Hansel and Gretel had the right idea about leaving a trail when entering a place like this. Obviously not of breadcrumbs. No, they'd learned their lesson with the breadcrumbs the hard way, but with something that wasn't edible.

Not that the idea would help her now. It was too late. She was already lost. She had already become disorientated. Spotting a fallen branch, she traipsed through the foliage until she reached it and sank onto the moss-covered trunk.

It was no use. She was lost.

And she had lost Mitch.

Forever.

The tears fell, and the sobs shook her body. She'd been happy with him as a friend. Why had they both wanted more? Aimed for more? They should have just been happy as they had been. Obviously, as they had been before, they'd grown apart, but as they had been before. They'd had fun then. That had been enough.

Chapter Twenty Four



The leaves rustled next to her, and she froze. A single tear ran down her nose and dropped to the foliage below her. She quietly wiped her eyes and watched as a deer hopped out from the trees, springing its way in front of her and to her right.

Holding her breath, she stood up, trying her best not to make a sound. Was it the deer she'd narrowly avoided on the road? Could it be going back to where it run from? From the other side of the road? Maybe. Probably not. It was worth a go though, wasn't it? Following it? If nothing else, it was better than sitting on that trunk until nightfall. She might as well give it a go.

Soon she had forgotten about trying to keep quiet. Soon she was just trying to keep the deer in her line of sight. As she ran forward, weaving between the trees, she jumped over a narrow brook. She didn't remember stepping over a brook. Maybe she'd just not noticed. She shrugged. She didn't have another plan. All she could do was to follow the deer.

Suddenly, a voice pierced through the rustling, and she stopped. Listening.

'Roxie?'

It was Mitch. She was sure of it. Cupping her hands around her mouth, she called, 'Here, I'm over here.'

'Keep calling so I can follow your voice.' It was Mitch's voice again, muffled but closer than before.

'I'm over here. This way.' She turned around, trying to work out in which direction he was coming. She couldn't.

'Roxie!' Appearing through the branches, Mitch ran towards her, wrapping his arms around her. 'I've been so worried. I saw the car and... Are you hurt? Did you get hurt?' He held out her arms, and brushed her hair out of her face, searching for any signs she'd been hurt.

'No, no. I'm fine. It was a deer. I almost crashed into a deer. I wanted to check I hadn't caught it with the car.' She waved her arms around her, encompassing the trees, the foliage, the deer.

'I was so worried.' Drawing her close to him again, he kissed the top of her head, his breath warm in her hair. 'Scott's here. He's looking at your car

as we speak.'

'Right. That's good.' She frowned. 'What about you? Why are you here?'

'I popped by the hall at The Fern to speak to you and saw your note to Molly. I then ran into Scott on my way Penworth Bay to see if I could catch you. I know you had asked Elsie to send your things, in your note, I mean, but I didn't know where else to start looking.'

'Right.' She couldn't think. Mitch was here.

'Why were leaving?' Stepping back, he looked at her, searching her face. She looked down at their hands, still entwined despite the conversation.

'Harvey came to see me.'

'I know.'

'You know?'

'Yes, he told me.'

'So, you know why I was leaving? I was leaving for you. I don't want to ruin your relationship with Harvey. You two are brothers. I will not get in the way.' And yet here she was, standing in the wood, holding hands with Mitch.

'Roxie, Harvey has nothing to do with us. He'll come around to the idea, eventually, and if he doesn't, he doesn't.'

'No.' She pulled her hands away from his. 'I can't come between the two of you. And I won't.'

'But you already have.' Mitch looked down at the ground, his voice soft.

'What do you mean?'

'Why do you think mine and Harvey's relationship is so strained? Why do you think I left the business? I've already said.'

'Because of me. You didn't like the way he was treating me.'

'Yes. And no. I didn't like the way he was treating another person. He showed his true colours after the fire, and I've tried to forget, to move past it, but...' He shrugged. 'I'll rebuild my relationship with him, and with Jen's help, he'll understand and accept us being together.'

'With Jen's help?'

'She's speaking to him now. I ran into him in the car park on my way to find you and told him in no uncertain terms that we were together, and we were staying together. Jen promised she'd speak to him, make sure he understands.' He cleared his throat. 'Of course, that's if you want to be together still?'

She looked towards the foliage to her left as a deer sprang from between the trees, pausing and tilting its head at them before springing away again.

She did want to be with him. That was all she wanted. And she supposed she just had to trust him when he said he was willing and ready to reconcile things with his brother. Stepping forward, she reached up and drew his face to hers, whispering against his lips. 'Yes, I do.'

Chapter Twenty Five



Roxie looked around the bakery. Elsie was holding one of her famous roast dinners for the people she fondly called her bakery family. Past volunteers, their partners, and families had come together to share the dinner that Elsie and Ian were busy cooking. She looked around at the swarm of faces, all people she now knew and could call her friends, and grinned.

‘And she’s been sleeping well?’ Olivia rocked Bonnie in her arms as she sat down next to Roxie at the long makeshift table.

‘Hah, no. Not at all. She’s up at least once every two hours.’ Daisy stifled a yawn. ‘Ollie’s been brilliant. We’ve really been working as a team looking after her. I’m just dreading when he goes back to work next week.’ Daisy grimaced.

‘Aw, I’m sure Elsie would be over the moon if you popped round and asked her to babysit whilst you had a nap.’ Freya leaned over Olivia’s shoulder and stroked baby Bonnie’s cheek.

‘Oh, I know. She’s already offered. You’ll probably see me here snoozing on the couch every afternoon!’ Daisy laughed as Ollie came up behind her, his hand rubbing her shoulder. ‘Do you want a drink?’

‘Oh, I’d love one, thanks. A juice or something, please.’ Taking his hand in hers, Daisy kissed his fingers.

‘How about you three? Do you need a drink?’

‘I’m okay, thanks.’ Roxie pointed to her glass perched on the table in front of her.

‘I’ll get one, but I’ll come and help you. Here you go, your turn.’ Olivia stood up, carefully passing Bonnie to Roxie.

‘Aw, she really is beautiful.’ Looking down at the tiny baby in her arms, she smiled.

‘And, just like that, our relationship has progressed to the next level.’ Mitch chuckled as he slipped into the chair next to her.

‘Haha, yes.’

‘She’s such a gorgeous little thing.’ Mitch held out his little finger, watching as Bonnie gripped hold of it, her tiny fingers wrapping around his finger.

‘Small, but demanding.’ Daisy shook her head. ‘Are you okay with her if I pop and see if Elsie and Ian need a hand? After all they’ve done for me recently, the least I can do is offer to help with dinner.’

‘Yes, of course.’ Roxie nodded before turning her attention back to Bonnie. ‘She’s got a firm grip, hasn’t she?’

‘Oh yes, I’m sure my finger will soon be turning blue and falling off.’ Mitch chuckled, his voice soft.

‘I bet.’

Leaning in towards her, Mitch spoke quietly, his mouth next to Roxie’s ear, his words inaudible to anyone else. ‘How many would you have?’

‘Children?’ She looked up at him. ‘Two.’

‘Me too.’ Grinning, he wrapped his free arm around her shoulders, his finger still being gripped by Bonnie.

‘Mummy! Baby! Baby! Baby!’

Looking up, Roxie watch as little Hudson ran full pelt towards her and baby Bonnie, Wendy desperately running behind, trying to catch him.

Standing up, Mitch scooped him up and sat him on his lap. ‘Hello, Hudson. Yes, here’s baby Bonnie.’

With his eyes wide open, Hudson reached out his chubby little finger and stroked Bonnie’s hair. ‘Baby.’

‘Thank you. I thought he was going to run straight into her then.’ Coming to a stop, Wendy lowered her bag against the wall and leaned over to look at Bonnie. ‘Oh, it’s so good to meet you at long last, little one.’

‘It’s good to see Hudson all better.’ Freya high-fived Hudson.

‘Oh, it sure is. The healthy Hudson is much less demanding than the poorly Hudson and that’s saying something!’ Wendy laughed as she straightened her back, holding out her hand to her partner, Connor, who walked across to join them. ‘Isn’t she just beautiful?’

‘Oh, she really is.’ Connor looked across at Hudson and tickled his tummy. ‘I can hardly believe you were once this small.’

Giggling, Hudson slithered off Mitch’s lap and prodded Wendy’s tummy. ‘Mummy have baby.’

‘There’s no baby in there, Hudson. Just cake.’ Wendy laughed.

‘No, Hudson want baby.’ He prodded Wendy’s tummy again, pointing at Bonnie with his other hand.

‘I guess that’s not such a bad idea, hey?’ Connor raised his eyebrows as he looked at Wendy.

Looking from Connor to Hudson, Wendy grinned as she slipped her hand into Connor's. 'Maybe one day, Huddy. Not today, though.'

Roxie stood up and nodded at her chair. 'Here, do you want a cuddle now that you can meet her properly?'

'Aw, thanks.' Sitting down, Wendy held out her arms as Roxie lowered little Bonnie towards her.

Picking up her glass of juice, she walked across towards the window, sidestepping as Teresa's children, Pippa, Toby and Reuben, pelted around the bakery, engrossed in a game of tag with Diane's partner, Harry. She grinned; Diane had warned her that Harry was worse than any child. She turned and looked out onto the cobbles. It was raining, not heavily, just a light sheen causing the cobbles to glisten in the light from the streetlamp outside.

'Are you okay?'

Feeling Mitch's arm around her waist, she turned and looked up at him. 'I am, thanks. I was just thinking what a beautiful place Penworth Bay is.'

He grinned. 'It sure is.'

'I'm going to miss this.' She used her glass to encompass the bakery.

'The bakery?'

'Yes, no. The bakery, the wedding planning, Elsie, Diane, Brooke, Molly, Wendy. All of them. Every one of Elsie's bakery family.' She blinked back a tear. 'I know it sounds daft, but I've come to look at them as that, as my extended family.'

'They are great. Every single one of them.' Mitch nodded as he rose his hand to Harry in greeting as he ran past them.

'They're more than great. They're the best. I've felt more at home here with these people and in this bay than I have in a very long time.' She smiled sadly. 'I'm going to miss them.'

Mitch crumpled up his forehead and looked at her. 'Maybe you don't have to.'

'Oh, I know. I've already arranged to visit in the summer, but it's not the same, not really.'

'I didn't mean to visit. I meant maybe you don't have to miss them. Maybe we don't have to leave.'

She frowned. What was he talking about? 'What do you mean?'

'Just that. You could transfer hospitals; I can work from anywhere. If we're happy here, why do we need to leave?'

Turning, she took his hand in her free one and met his gaze. ‘Are you being serious?’

Mitch nodded. ‘Yes, yes, I am.’

‘But what about Harvey, your family?’

‘We’re meeting Harvey and Jen to talk next weekend, aren’t we? And Jen is confident we can make things up, but maybe this would be a good thing for him too? We wouldn’t be around, a constant reminder of our relationship.’ He shrugged. ‘Of course, that isn’t the reason I’d be happy moving down here, but it would be a bonus.’

‘Huh, I hadn’t thought of it like that.’ She frowned. ‘What is stopping us?’

‘Ultimately, it’s only the two of us standing in the way.’ He shrugged.

‘True. Let’s do it then!’ Throwing her arms around him, she grinned. Were they really going to do this?

‘What are you two looking so happy about?’ Walking towards them, Elsie threw a tea towel over her shoulder and placed one hand on Roxie’s forearm and one on Mitch’s.

‘We decided to move down to Penworth Bay.’ Roxie wiped tears from her eyes.

‘You’re staying?’ Elsie covered her mouth, looking from Roxie to Mitch and back again.

‘If you’ll accept us as part of your bakery family, that is?’

‘Accept you? It would be my pleasure. Oh, loves, that’s fantastic news.’ Elsie drew them both in for a hug before holding their hands above their heads and turning to the room. ‘Roxie and Mitch are staying!’

Roxie caught Mitch’s eye as a chorus of ‘yays’ and ‘congratulations’ filled the bakery. This was their new start. The beginning of the rest of their lives.

Epilogue



‘Thank you, Jen. Bye, Harvey.’ Roxie hugged Jen before nodding across the table at Harvey. Neither of them were ready to hug the other. Not yet.

‘Yes, thank you, Jen. See you, Harvey.’ Standing up from the pub table, Mitch looked at his brother.

‘Bye.’ Harvey held out his hand.

Raising her eyebrows, Roxie met Jen’s eyes as Mitch took Harvey’s hand before stepping forward and hugging him. Holding her breath, she watched in relief as Harvey hugged him back. She knew how much Mitch had been worrying about meeting up with Harvey and Jen today, about trying to reconcile things between them. The two of them hugging was more than Roxie, or Jen, for that matter, could ever have hoped for.

As Mitch stepped back, he took Roxie’s hand as they walked outside, leaving Harvey and Jen to finish their coffees.

With the sun on their faces, Roxie looked across at him and grinned. ‘I can almost feel the tension fading away from you.’

‘Oh, it’s definitely fading. I can literally feel it falling from my back.’ Mitch chuckled and turned to face her. ‘Seriously though, I couldn’t have hoped for better.’

‘Jen certainly must have worked her magic on Harvey.’ Leaning across, she kissed him. ‘It’s good to see you two talking again.’

‘I know. It is, isn’t it? For a while there, it felt just like old times.’ Mitch smiled. ‘Thank you.’

‘For what?’

‘For coming with me. For always being there for me.’

‘Huh, you haven’t forgotten that if it hadn’t been for me, you and Harvey wouldn’t have fallen out in the first place, have you?’

‘Ha-ha, I’m sure there would have been something else to fall out about. Seriously, thank you.’ Turning, he wrapped his arms around her. ‘I love you, Roxie.’

‘I love you too, Mitch.’ And looking into his eyes, she knew they’d made the perfect decision to stay in Penworth Bay. ‘Ouch!’ Leaning down, she

rubbed at her ankle.

‘Oh, I’m so so sorry. Did I catch you with my suitcase? I did, didn’t I? I’m so clumsy. Everyone tells me I am.’ A woman pushed her dark hair away from her eyes and winced as she looked down at Roxie’s ankle.

‘Don’t worry. I’m okay.’ Roxie rubbed her ankle before looking from the huge suitcase to the woman now standing in front of them. ‘That looks heavy.’

‘You have no idea. I don’t know what I was thinking, trying to bring that monstrosity down here. First, I couldn’t lift it to put it on the shelves on the train, so I spent the whole journey sitting on it outside the carriage toilet. And that’s not a nice place to sit, I’ll tell you.’ The woman took a deep breath. ‘The bus was better. The lovely bus driver let me store it underneath in the boot. Is it called a boot on a bus? Do they have boots?’ She looked from Roxie to Mitch and back again.

‘I’m not sure.’ Roxie shrugged.

‘Thankfully, I’m on the leg of my journey now. Not that it matters if I can’t find where I’m going, does it?’ She circled her finger in the air. ‘I’ve just been walking round and round trying to find the place and I have a feeling I’m no closer than when the bus driver first dropped me here.’

‘Where is it you’re going? Maybe we can help?’ Roxie looked up at Mitch. If it was in the bay, they’d be fine, but if not, then they were both still trying to work out where places were themselves.

‘The Cornish Bay Bakery, I think it’s called.’ The woman sighed and looked down the hill to the beach. ‘I’m late, of course. The story of my life and now I can’t even find the place.’

‘Oh, you’re not Carmen, by any chance, are you?’ Roxie grinned.

‘Yes, that’s me.’

‘I’m Roxie and this is Mitch. I’ve not long ago finished volunteering there myself. Elsie mentioned she was expecting you.’

‘Really? Oh, it’s lovely to meet you both. In that case, you must know where it is?’

‘Yes, we do. Here, we’ll walk you down.’ Roxie linked arms with Carmen.

‘Let me take your suitcase for you.’ Grinning, Mitch picked up the suitcase and carried it for a metre or two before thinking twice, lowering it to the tarmac and pulling it along on its wheels.



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Volunteer at The Cornish Bay Bakery in exchange for a cosy room
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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
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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

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Want to escape the pressures of work?*

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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

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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

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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 beautiful 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
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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**

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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

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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>