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Opening Extract from...

Breakfast Under a Cornish Sun

Written by Samantha Tonge

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1

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CHAPTER 1

Taut bare chest boasting a natural-looking six-pack. Muscular arms wielding a scythe. Raven curls rippling in the breeze. Smouldering expression tense as the grass-cutting implement is raised in the air. The hint of manly, musky perspiration. All this set against rugged Cornish countryside . . .

Mmm. Thanks to scenes from my *Poldark* box set, any free window of time in my head is easily filled. For those of you unfamiliar with the hit Cornish mining television series, book yourself a doctor's appointment. You must be seriously loopy—as in out of the loop!

OK. Apologies. Perhaps that was a bit rude. Not everyone, like me, is a self-confessed geek when it comes to historical books and films—for example, did you know the original title for *Pride and Prejudice* was *First Impressions*? Talking of which, I probably didn't look my most appealing at the moment, having just bitten into a black cherry doughnut. I suspected a

splodge of the filling had stuck to my nose. But mmm . . . the oozing maroon sauce tasted almost alcoholic and offered the same effect as a cheerful cocktail—that is a feel-good warmth flowing down my throat to the rest of my body.

Eyes closed, I made an appreciative noise as I savoured another bite, its piquant flavours heightened by a mouthful of rich hot espresso.

'Dreaming of unpaid overtime, are, you? Honestly, Kate, stop being such a workaholic.'

'Ha, ha—aren't you funny?' I opened my eyes. 'Not that paying me more would be a problem, due to the profit this place makes. In fact, perhaps I was dreaming of a huge pay rise.'

I grinned across the table at my boss, Izzy. I say 'boss'—she's become more like my best friend, in the two years I've been waitressing at Donuts & Daiquiris. I know—strange name, people usually think of that sugary snack as accompanying caffeinated drinks. I never know whether to tell people I work in a café or bar as it's both. Come six o'clock, purple neon lights shoot across the room and tall glasses replace ceramic mugs.

Izzy loves neon. Adores bright colours and her appearance in the morning never fails to cheer me up. Imagine the shortest ash-blonde hair, accompanied by a slash of scarlet lipstick and clothes that look as if they've been dipped in a rainbow. Tie-dye is her favourite. What a contrast to brown-haired, less conspicuous me, who

prefers muted, autumnal colours—ironic, considering I'm a very unmuted singer.

'I offered you a salary hike only last month,' she protested.

'Charity, I don't need,' I said and Izzy blushed. 'You can't pay me more than the other staff.'

'But you work the hardest,' she said. 'If only you weren't so stubborn, Kate. I know things are tight for you at the moment.'

'Nice jumpsuit,' I said, rapidly changing the subject. I admired how her eyeshadow exactly matched the material's shade of Dory blue. Yes, that was a *Finding Nemo* reference. Izzy also loved Disney movies and, between us, I didn't mind watching *Frozen* with her half as much as I declared. When it came to the staff's clothes, Izzy was pretty relaxed, as long as our outfits were clean, ironed and covered by one of her branded aprons—think white cloth edged with mini doughnuts and cocktails. Unlike the after-school club job I had before this one, where the way we looked after the kids was as regimented as their uniform. I couldn't carry on treating children like numbers instead of the individuals.

It was two-thirty in the afternoon—the perfect opportunity for a quick break between the lunchtime and after-school rush. The . . . let's call it a café-bar—fulfilled the needs of an array of customers, with its colourful tables and gilt bar. At eight in the morning, we'd serve

espressos and cinnamon ring doughnuts to the sleepy breakfast brigade. Mid-morning saw people out to treat themselves to a frothy latte and a chocolate-filled delight. At lunch we bring out the savoury options. Izzy is nothing but inventive and her most popular creations are herbed doughnuts filled with cream cheese. Then, at the end of their school day, children wanted glazed ones topped with colourful sprinkles, accompanied by a fizzy drink.

It's the evening I liked best though, when we dimmed the lights and put out the cocktail menus. Nothing accompanied a Cosmopolitan better than a prettily iced doughnut filled with orange crème. Or a cucumber gin and tonic slipped down nicely with a cheddar and jalapeno batter ring. And Izzy baked the prettiest mini caramel ones, the size of macaroons, to complement richer toffee Martinis. We had our regular drinkers, as well as the hen party crowds. Take Sheila and Frank. They always dressed up and ordered two Snowballs. At their wedding, in the fifties, the first dance song was 'My Funny Valentine' by Frank Sinatra. Sometimes I'd sing it for them. And I mustn't forget Mrs Sharp and her daughter. They swooned over Izzy's special tiramisu doughnuts, made from Marsala-infused batter and filled with mascarpone. Mmm.

Sorry. I'm rambling. Thanks to Izzy, I'm a bit of a doughnut geek as well. I yawned.

'How did the gig go last night?' said Izzy and wiped her mouth with a napkin.

'Not a bad crowd. Bit older than usual. In the end I veered away from the trendy stuff and stuck to seventies disco. Gloria Gaynor always goes down well.'

Yes, when I'm not serving cocktails during the evening shift, I race off to sing at some party or in a pub. Big dreams I've got. Would love to be a singer-songwriter—if I ever pluck up the courage to perform some of my own stuff. My style is kind of like . . . Adele's. But I am less operatic with just a touch of cockney Lily Allen. And some say my voice has the depths of Joss Stone . . . Hmm, OK, maybe I can't be tidily pigeon-holed. I like pop, rock and country and could never restrict my songwriting to one genre. Not that I have written anything for a while.

'Heard any more from Stanley Hotel?' she said. 'Is that regular singing slot definitely cancelled?'

My stomach scrunched and I pushed away the last mouthful of cherry gorgeousness, suddenly losing my appetite. I placed my elbows on the table and rested my chin on my hands. 'Yes. Can't believe it. My first regular gig for ages and within a week of agreeing the terms, it's all over.'

'Do you know why yet?'

'I rang up last night. The manager didn't know the hotel was about to go into liquidation. It's been bought out. This time next year it will be a nursing home. The poor guy was so apologetic—promised to book me for his fiftieth birthday party, later this year.'

Izzy leant forward as my phone rang and squeezed my hand. 'Something else will come up, lovely. Remember to bring in more business cards for the doughnut counter, the pile is running low. And we're hosting two hen nights next week . . . I bet they'd appreciate some fun singing *à la* Katy Perry or old-school Madonna. I'll pay you the going rate.'

My chest glowed as I picked up my mobile. Izzy was the best. If I went around to hers because I was still missing Johnny . . . A lump rose in my throat. Despite all my hopeful Facebook messages to him, over the last ten months, I still never got a response. At the beginning, I'd click obsessively, longing to spot the marker 'seen' pop up. And when it never did, my chest felt as if someone has placed me in a vice and turned the handle as tight as they could.

Many an evening, Izzy had invited me over to cheer me up and tolerated watching a few episodes of my favourite historical series on Netflix—as long as she had time for a few rounds of Bejeweled before bed or a catch-up episode of her latest favourite baking show. And she always had a box of tissues on her coffee table—along with, of course, a sample of her latest battered circular creation. A friendship with Izzy would be futile if you suffered from indigestion, but was perfect if your heart was breaking, over a boyfriend.

'Hello?' I said, not recognising the number that had dialled.

'Is that you? Katie?' said a voice as smooth as treacle.

I shuddered. No one called me that. Not since school. A shiver ran up and down my spine and my mouth felt as if I'd eaten a handful of dry cream crackers. That liquid sugar tone sounded so familiar yet I just couldn't identify the owner. It sounded like the meow of a cat that had just spied the mouse it wished to pounce upon.

'Katie Golightly?'

My stomach tightened further as I recalled what an unfortunate surname that had been at school. You see with my love of vintage clothes and retro music, I stuck out from the crowd. A group of girls made up alternative surnames—Godrearily, Goseriously, Goboringly were just a few. I smiled. Thank goodness for Guvnah who taught me spiteful opinions weren't worth a moment's thought.

Ooh, quick explanation—my granddad always jokingly called my gran the Governor. When I learnt how to write, Guvnah seemed the obvious spelling and the nickname has kind of stuck.

'Katie, hi. It's Saffron!'

I dropped my teaspoon. Size eight, glossy-haired Miss Perfect, head of the spiteful crew.

'Oh,' I managed. 'How nice to hear from you' would be the polite response, but I just couldn't squeeze that sentence from my mouth.

'Surprised you, have I?' she said in bright tones. As she giggled, I could just imagine Saffron tossing

her blonde mane. It was still blonde. I knew that from Facebook. You see, about six months ago, she'd sent me a friend request and one of my worst personality traits is my uncontrollable sense of curiosity. For example, if spam gets sent straight to my junk mail box, I have an overwhelming urge to open it. So I accepted Saffron's friend request with the lesson still to learn that curiosity might kill Kate, as much as the cat.

A small part of me was hoping that twelve years later she'd be frumpy and dumpy—but no. She was still the golden girl, with lots of friends and worked as an English teacher. Plus she had a fiancé—called Miles.

'Yes. You have surprised me. It's . . . been a while.'

Come on. We were adults. I could do this. The past was the past. Surely I could forget the way she'd dumped me suddenly at high school, after us being best friends for years? We had it all mapped out a junior school, you know—after the sixth form we'd share an apartment in London and own a dog. Saffron was going to be an actress, me a pop star. We'd cook together, go shopping . . . honestly, the hours we spent discussing the decor of our flat.

But then she ditched me. Found trendier friends. Became Miss Popular with girls and boys alike. No explanation. At first, I didn't realise what was happening. I recall it clearly, the very first time I realised she was laughing *at* me, not with. We bumped into each other at the swimming pool. I'd gone on my own. Saffron and

her new friends all wore skimpy bikinis. I wore my black sports costume that hugged every generous curve and a swimming cap that gave me hamster cheeks but Mum insisted I wear it, for the sake of my hair. Cue snide whispers about puppy fat, moon faces and unwaxed legs. Saffron giggled with her posse, yet couldn't quite give me eye contact. The broken trust broke my heart and it was a long time before I invested that much emotion in another person again. Dear Izzy renewed my belief that good people existed. As did my darling Johnny.

To my surprise, Saffron and I did have one thing in common now: an obsession with *Poldark*. She was always posting photos of the programme's lead, with his tousled black hair, brooding looks and hairy chest. Do you know, the BBC actually employ someone to trim that, during filming? Nice work if you can get it. In fact I'd pay the television company to let me do Poldark Pruning. Her Facebook banner featured that iconic image of him topless, cutting grass, and her profile photo was of her made up like his redheaded wife Demelza, for a fancy-dress party.

I cleared my throat. 'How did you . . . ?'

'Get your phone number?' Her laugh tinkled down the phone once more. 'A bit of detective work. You're in the entertainment business now, aren't you? You linked a website to your Facebook page once, where singers could advertise their services and your profile is on there.'

Ah. Of course.

'How are you?' she said. 'You look fab from your Facebook profile.'

My cheeks burned hot. Was she silent-laughing down her end of the phone? Did she really like the boho chocolate dress, with hanging beads and my shoulder-length hair, with a fifties short fringe? Izzy looked at me again as I pursed my lips. My eyes tingled. This was ridiculous. How could a simple phone call summon up demons I thought I'd well and truly exorcised? Images of sneering faces on non-uniform days appeared in my mind. I was the third eldest of six children and was rarely bought new clothes or schoolbags. Keeping up with fashion? Even if I'd been interested, I'd never have had the cash.

'And how great to follow your dream and be a singer. What's the biggest gig you've played?'

My cheeks burned hotter. 'Riverside Stadium.'

'Wow. Sounds like a huge venue. How many thousands did you play to?'

I swallowed. 'Not many. That's actually the name of a bar. But it was for a fortieth birthday and brought me a couple of other bookings . . .' I rambled, bracing myself for some sarcastic response—like the time I'd come top in a French test. She'd laughed when one of her cronies muttered that Katie Gochastely may know the French language but had undoubtedly never once been French-kissed.

However, Saffron simply congratulated me. 'Must be hard, trying to find singing work—no doubt you support your dream with a solid job?'

'Yes. I work in catering,' I said and swallowed. I looked down as Izzy's brightly nail-varnished fingers curled over my free hand on the table. She squeezed tight and I forced a smile.

'Ooh, can you cook? I love watching Jamie Oliver.'

'No. I'm a waitress,' I said in a smaller voice and braced myself for a snigger.

'I imagine a flexible job like that fits in well around your sporadic singing commitments,' she said in a breezy voice.

What? No insult. My shoulders relaxed. Izzy smiled and I nodded. She took away her hand and started to clear our plates.

'Yes, it does actually. And you're a teacher?'

'I know! Never thought I'd end up going back to school. I met Miles on one of the careers' days. He's the uncle of one of my students and came in to give a talk on being an accountant.'

'Congratulations on your engagement,' I said. Why on earth had she rung? When would this torture end?

'Thanks. Yes. Miles is wonderful. I'm a very lucky lady. And . . . are you with someone, Katie?'

Shoulders tight again, I grimaced. Oh great. She'd already won in the intellectual professional stakes, what with her following a life of academia and having a solid