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Opening Extract from...

Destiny

Written by Louise Bagshawe

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DESTINY



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This book is dedicated to Alex Timpson, who is nothing like the character named after her! Mrs Timpson won the prize of a character named for her in a charity auction, and chose a villain. She has dedicated much of her life to charitable works including the fostering of children. I hope she enjoys *Destiny* as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Prologue

'And there he is.' Kate Fox breathed out.

Across the room, surrounded by sycophants and hangers-on, stood Marcus Broder. Wearing an impeccably tailored suit, and a confident smile. One of the richest men in the city.

'That's him,' she said lightly. 'My future husband.'

'Are you sure?' Emily asked. 'I don't like him.'

Kate smiled. 'But of course,' she said, lifting her champagne flute to her lips. It was antique Baccarat crystal, filled with vintage Pol Roger. 'Honey, men like him aren't meant to be *liked*.'

She would take only a few sips. She was always in control.

The party ebbed and flowed around them. They were standing in the great ballroom of the Victrix, the most opulent hotel in Manhattan. The enormous gilded space was made almost intimate by the crush, the press of bodies. Half of Wall Street's finest were here tonight. Just glancing around, Kate spotted four supermodels, a senator, two members of the New York Yankees, and a late-night TV host.

The social registry and the powerbroking elite were equally well represented.

Marcus Broder knew how to party.

It was his birthday. Not a milestone; just a regular birthday.

But nothing in the life of the great media mogul went unremarked. Invitations thudded on to the doormats of New York's priciest Fifth Avenue penthouses and Greenwich Village mansions, unsubtle things in thick, creamy envelopes, stiff cardboard edged in gold.

The A list all got one.

They were both an acknowledgement of the recipients' sure social standing, and a command to pay homage. Not many who turned Marcus down would be invited a second time.

'So is he going to be your boss, too?' Kate turned to her friend, her green eyes alight with interest.

Emily shook her head. Kate had known her since school, and supported her as she climbed the ladder. They'd always been close, despite their obvious differences. Kate was the butterfly, Emily the moth. Whereas Kate was slim, blond and startlingly pretty – and careful to maintain it all – Emily was short, dumpy and possessed of an untamed mane of curly brown hair. They had both lived their passions.

Emily's was magazines.

Kate's was money.

Kate wanted no part of Emily's hard-working life. But she still admired her for it. Emily got up early, not to jog or hit a Pilates class, but to cycle up to midtown and the dingy offices of her little publication, *Lucky*. It was a magazine version of the *Village Voice*, and produced clever writing on everything from alternative rock acts to global warming. Readership was small but loyal, and Emily was making a living out of it. *Lucky* was her baby, so she had no time for romance, apparently.

That was OK. Kate had dated enough for two.

Kate was also in magazines. At *Cutie*, the huge-selling women's title Marcus Broder had taken over a few months

back. She was a contributing editor, on a nice safe salary. She wrote lots of stylish features on fashion, and a devoted coterie of readers followed her every word. But it was not entrepreneurial, not risky. Kate Fox was not a career girl. She had her eyes on something easier and far more lucrative.

Like a big diamond ring and the man who went with it.

'No.' Emily shook her head. 'I decided not to sell.'

Kate's eyes widened. 'But Em, Broder was offering you a ton of cash. He'd have made your fortune!'

'And taken *Lucky*.'

Kate shrugged. 'You could start another magazine.'

'It wouldn't be the same,' Emily said doggedly. 'We're unique. Everything's so conformist these days.'

'Then edit it for him.'

'It would just turn into another Broder title. Bland and big-selling. He puts his own stamp on everything he owns, or haven't you noticed?'

Kate nodded, slowly. Indeed she had noticed. Maybe Emily intended to put her off. The trouble was that she found this arousing. Marcus Broder didn't care what the world was like. He just shaped it the way he wanted it to be.

His third divorce had been Manhattan's big news of the summer. Yet another Mrs Broder tried and found wanting. Marcus had sued in Connecticut for unreasonable behaviour, and his Costa Rican ex-supermodel wife had not contested it. She would never have to lift a finger for the rest of her life, and besides, you didn't make an enemy of Marcus, not if you were smart.

Broder was back on the market. As Kate glanced around the party, she saw the excitement crackling through the young women. Models and socialites had come in their skimpiest dresses and largest jewels. There was enough

hairspray and scent in the room to crack the ozone layer. No surprise; ever since the Broder divorce broke on the *Post*'s Page Six, you could hear the sound of garter belts snapping and push-up bras clicking all over town. He was the biggest lion in the jungle. The next Mrs Broder would live a life of unimaginable luxury.

Every gold-digger on the East Coast was on the prowl.

Kate could see Marcus now, across the room. He was standing talking to Liana Forrest, an Emmy-award-winning actress from a police procedural possessed of eye-popping fake boobs and glossy black hair. His body language was predatory. She could tell he was planning to bed her. A second later, he turned to talk to the tall, slim figure of Alexandra Timpson, the legendary fifty-something socialite who ruled the Manhattan scene with a rod of iron. Mrs Timpson hosted parties; she rarely attended them. Her presence here was a sign of Marcus Broder's massive reach. He was speaking to her warmly, deferentially. Keeping the actress in her place, waiting.

Kate took another sip of her champagne. Liana didn't matter. None of them did. She was about to brush her aside. *She* was going to marry Marcus Broder. She, Kate Fox, was going to live that life, the one they all lusted after. And she was going to do it brilliantly. Kate would be the wife who stuck.

They called them trophy wives, but it was the other way around, wasn't it? The men were the trophies. The women were out there, hunting the big game. And Marcus Broder was the head she wanted mounted on her wall. The biggest prize in New York. The gold ring . . .

Emily followed Kate's eyes, and sighed. She was used to seeing her friend get what she wanted. Even if it was wrong

for her, even if it ate up a little bit of her soul, every day.

'You're certain you want to go out with him?' she protested. 'He's got such a bad reputation . . .'

Her friend turned those emerald eyes towards her and smiled, and Emily felt her reservations evaporating, the way they always did.

'But so do I,' Kate laughed.

She glanced back at Marcus. In a second, she would go over there, bold, fearless, a natural beauty, confidence and *joie de vivre* making her irresistible.

'I'm not just going to date him, Em. I'm going to marry him.' Kate smiled. 'He's my destiny.'

Chapter One

'I'm so sorry,' the nurse said again. 'There was really nothing we could do. She was DOA.'

Kate looked at her mom. She could barely recognise her, covered in tubes, her head and face spattered with blood.

'I'm sorry, miss.' This time it was a doctor, an Indian guy. 'If you can make a formal ID now, we can spare you going to the morgue later.'

Kate swallowed. 'That's her – that's Mom.'

Her voice was barely a whisper. She stood there in her school uniform, her eyes red with crying. A car accident, that was what they said. Joyriders, drunk after the Yankees game, tearing down Grand Concourse Avenue in the Bronx. Wiping her mother out as she crossed the street. They said it had been instant. But that was something Kate would never know for sure. Because her mom had died alone.

She felt a sudden, violent surge of rage mixing in with the grief. Fury at the selfish punks driving that broken-down car. Would they get justice? Rot in jail for the rest of their miserable lives? She would see to it, she would testify in court . . .

Oh, shit; what the hell did it matter. She looked back at her mother's corpse. Mom would still be dead.

Kate turned away. A deeper anger was bubbling up inside

her now. Forget those punks. Her rage was at a man she hadn't seen for years.

Her father.

Asshole. Deadbeat. Traitor.

Dad – if she should even think of him that way – had bailed on them when Kate was four. She had memories, fuzzy ones. A big, strong chest. Arms picking her up. Being carried to her little bed, the one with the special pink eiderdown with little white geese on it.

And then crying, because he went. And didn't come back.

For the first couple of years he sent birthday presents, something at Christmas. A few hastily scrawled letters to Mom. That he was working things out, finding himself. He'd be back when he had figured it out. Kate had a vague recollection of waiting, hoping. Maybe he'd be back for the Fourth of July. Or Thanksgiving – he'd just walk through the door and sweep her up into a bear hug.

But he didn't walk through the door. And the presents turned into cards, and then they stopped.

There was no more contact.

And there was no money.

Mom did her best. She kept Kate tight and close. She worked real hard at providing a normal home. The apartment was small, but it was clean and cosy and Mom made the rent right on time, every month. Dad was a building contractor with a good job, and there were some savings, and health insurance. Kate even went to a little parochial elementary school, where they charged a fee and there was a good mix of kids.

When she was six, though, the savings were done. Dad had evidently worked for his boss for a while after he left, so the insurance kept up, but then a letter landed on their

doormat telling Mom that he had quit and there was no more healthcare. Her mom sat her down at the kitchen table, her voice falsely bright over their dinner of pasta and sausage with tomato sauce, and told her that Mommy had to go to work now, and that when Kate got back from school she needed to be the big girl of the house and let herself in. The key would be with their neighbour. Kate had to do her homework for a little while without Mom being there. That way, they could still make the rent and have their home . . .

As Kate stared at the motionless figure on the bed, her own words drifted back to her, down the years. 'I'll be fine, Momma.' Both of them trying so hard to be upbeat. 'It'll be great. I'll get all my work done, I promise . . .'

And then, everything blurred: the years of anxiety, always accompanied by the ache in her stomach, the nerves. Would Momma's new job keep them safe? It was a bad time in the Bronx, lots of layoffs. Every few months her mother came back in tears, with a severance payment. She tried everything: she bagged groceries, worked in a pharmacy, waitressed for a while. But she was a stay-at-home mother, abandoned; she had no skills to speak of. It was low-grade stuff, bad pay. She took two jobs, one at daytime, one at night. Kate seldom saw her. Sundays together became very precious, and she tried not to show how her mother's exhaustion worried her.

Kate did her bit. She worked on her grades, because when she came home with an A, Mom's smile reached all the way to her eyes, for once. She kept the house clean, vaccuming, even dusting. And she kept herself pretty.

'I want better for you.' Mom rarely talked about it, but when she did, her bony hand gripped Kate's shoulder, and her tired eyes grew hard as flint. 'You do well at school. You promise me.'

'Mom, I promise. I *am* doing well . . .'

'And stay beautiful, Kate. That's the real deal, right there. What they won't talk about. But it's true.'

'Sister Francis says that true beauty is on the inside,' Kate ventured. She was eleven then, brown haired and cute, with a dusting of freckles over her nose and creamy white skin.

'Sister Francis is married to Jesus. And he ain't particular about looks.'

Kate snorted with laughter. She loved it when her mother joked; it was so rare, these days. Mom was too drained to laugh.

'But other men are, Kate, remember that. You need to find somebody who will take you away from all this. Pay your mortgage. I don't want you renting, you hear me? You don't go out with anybody from round here.'

Kate swallowed. She kind of liked Freddie Ciccio, her best friend's older brother. But she knew better than to bring that up.

'You date men with *money*. You're going to be a real pretty girl. He should live in Park Slope. Or even Manhattan. And don't give him too much; make him marry you. The kind of man, if he leaves, you get a lawyer.' Mom's fist curled into a ball. 'And you take him for all he's worth.'

'So.' Kate tossed her little brown bob. 'If you want me to marry for money, Momma, why do I have to study so hard in school? I mean, what's the point? Cinderella didn't go to college, you know.'

She smiled, pleased with that little sally. But her mother's grey eyes clouded.

'Because sometimes things don't work out, honey. And if you can't marry the right guy, you need to have a backup. You know, work at better jobs than your momma.'

'You do great, Mom.' The fun was gone from the conversation now, Kate wanted to cry.

'No, I don't, honey.'

A tear trickled down Kate's cheek, and she swallowed, hard. Her mother relented, reaching out her bony hand and tucking a lock of chestnut hair behind her daughter's ear.

'OK, darling, don't cry. I do well enough, I guess. We have our place. We make the rent.'

'That's right.'

'And I keep you in private school. Understand me, sweetie.' Her mother's eyes were fierce. 'That's what keeps me going when I'm tired enough to just drop. That we don't have anything, but you're educated. If you can't marry well, after all that, you can work. White collar. Better than me. Better than Dad, even.'

'I don't have a dad,' Kate said, and her voice was ice.

'Don't be like that,' Mom replied, but her protest was half-hearted.

'I just have you, Mom. And you're all I need. I'm making good grades, aren't I?'

'The best.' Her mother cracked another smile and ruffled her hair.

'I'm going to go to college. Scholarship.' Kate tossed her eleven-year-old curls. 'Ivy League, maybe. Maybe Harvard.'

Her mother was delighted. 'You keep dreaming, honey. College is great. Any college.'

And there it was. Kate heard the words in the back of her brain, even as she stared at her mother's lifeless body. Their plan. Their pact. She, little Kate Fox, was going to be the one-two punch, the complete package. A brainbox on her way to college, clawing her way out of the neighbourhood, doing whatever it took. And yet she wouldn't be like the

other geeks in school, with their thick glasses and their retainers and their pudgy, soft bodies. She would work at having the face of a model and the body of a cheerleader. There was no money for designer clothes or shoes, but drugstore cosmetics came cheap, and you could buy blond hair dye by L'Oréal, in a box, for less than ten dollars. Mom would manicure her nails and pluck her brows. And that was what Kate Fox would be to the world.

Obviously, too good for the Bronx.

Obviously, on her way to Manhattan.

She didn't need to be told twice. As Mom slaved away, Kate eagerly, frantically put the plan into action. Her grades improved still further, but so did her beauty. At twelve, she was already jogging around the block and blow-drying her hair. When she hit puberty, she really pulled out all the stops. Lipstick and perfume, and make-up that the other girls in school envied and didn't understand. When Maria and Elizabetta were lashing on four coats of mascara and fire-engine-red lips, Kate was experimenting with tinted moisturiser and bronzer used as blush. She had a healthy, athletic glow, big hair, and very white teeth, and she smelled of mouthwash and fresh shampoo.

The boys clustered around like flies.

Mom was so proud. Even as she got older, and more exhausted, and her back started to stoop a little, watching her daughter blossom filled her with a kind of inner glow. Kate was so desperate to please her, she took all her advice, wholesale. She treated the guys from school with the same contempt her mom did. Tempered with politeness, but they knew when to back off. And few of them fought it. Kate Fox was so clearly not for them. Obviously destined for bigger, better things.

They got by, Mom and her. At Kate's own insistence, she worked Saturdays at a small clothing store down the block, behind the counter, selling summer T-shirts to her school-friends and others. Cheap stuff from China, that turned into woolly hats and gloves in the freezing New York winters. The boys on the block used to come in and spend more than they could afford, just to impress her. But it was hard, dull work for peanuts, and doing it made Kate love her mother even more. Because this kind of grunt work was what her mother slaved at daily, just to keep them housed and fed.

It also made her hate her father.

He'd left. Abandoned them. And he was the kind of scrub who couldn't provide for his ex-wife and daughter. Momma was doing all this because she'd married a loser. Simple as that.

And now here she was, and her mother was dead. What would happen now? What would happen to the plan? What would happen to Kate?

She turned sharply on her heel, and walked away from her mother's body. She just could not bear to look at it any more.

'You. Miss.' The doctor came running after her. 'How old are you?'

She drew herself up proudly. 'Sixteen.'

'You're the only relative listed on the contact sheet. Do you have someplace to go, honey? A grandma, something?'

'It's Kate Fox,' she said, coolly. 'And I'm going home. To organise Momma's funeral.'

The doctor was unfazed by the rebuke. 'Well, Ms Fox, if you're a minor and you have no adult relative to look after you, I have to contact children's services, it's the law. You understand . . .'

'Oh, you're doing your job.' She turned then, and smiled at him with an open confidence that was completely charming. The doctor returned her smile, almost helplessly. 'That's fine, Doc. But I have a dad. I was living with Mom after the divorce, but now he's coming back to look after me.'

'Do you have some contact details for him? For release of the body?' the man attempted, feebly.

Kate brushed it aside. 'Well, they *were* divorced. I'm next of kin. I'll fix it up with Father Peter, he's our priest. At Mary Star of the Sea?'

'Uh . . . yes. I know the church. But . . .'

'And then I'll go live with my father.' Kate nodded firmly. 'That's what Mom would have wanted. She wouldn't want to see me fall apart. My dad works in Manhattan, you know,' she said, importantly. 'He's an engineer.'

'OK. OK.' Beaten into retreat, the doctor smiled weakly back. 'If you're sure . . .'

'Somebody will ring you tonight about Mom,' Kate said. 'Thank you, Doctor.'

And he was left staring after her back as she marched out of the ward.

Kate didn't dissolve. Not in the hospital grounds. Not on the bus, on the way back home. Not until after she had actually called the church, and gotten a discount from their local funeral parlour; Father Peter, distressed beyond belief, rang them and told them that if they didn't bury Mary Fox for next to nothing, he would see to it that all his elderly parishioners started to switch their burial arrangements to the more modern establishment a few streets away.

Only that night, once everything was in place and her mother's body had been properly removed for burial, did Kate fling herself face down on Mom's bed, wailing as though

her heart had been ripped from her chest, as though she would never, ever recover.

That was the weird thing about a broken heart, Kate thought; it actually still worked. Even if you didn't want it to. It still kept right on pumping that blood around your body. When you longed to close your eyes and sink into darkness, you still woke the next day, seeing the harsh light of morning, hearing the cars honk, smelling the bagels cooking in the coffee joints. Every day, just the same. Her mom was still dead. And she was still here.

She tracked her dad down. It didn't take too long, if you called his old workplace, made a concerted effort. There was a real awkward telephone call. Great to hear from her, he said, with false heartiness. He was sorry about her mother. Kate's accusatory silence hung heavy in the air, and her father started talking to fill it, the hurtful words tumbling out of him, telling her about his life as though she were some distant cousin, some old acquaintance. He was living in Florida, had remarried. Got three little boys. Thing was, they only had a four-bedroom house and his wife Georgette was knocked up again . . . a surprise stepdaughter would be stressful to a pregnant woman . . .

Surprise?

Yeah, well. He hadn't told her. Clean slate, all that stuff. Better for everybody . . .

Kate didn't bother to argue. What was the point? A tiny flicker of hope against hope, that she'd carried for a long time, died in her, but it was nothing compared to the ongoing pain of Mom's loss. Quickly she turned things around. He would send her twenty thousand dollars, she said.

He laughed. He didn't have it.

That laugh was a mistake. Driven to fury, Kate made him a promise. That if he did not send it, she would turn up in Florida. On his doorstep. To say hi to her stepmom and half-brothers. Oh yeah, and she'd bring the cops with her, for non-payment of child support. He owed her.

'Wait,' her father whined. 'I need time, baby. Gimme some time . . .'

'Don't call me baby. It's Kate. And you can have time.'

'OK.' He exhaled, let off the hook. 'OK . . .'

'Until Friday. That's four working days. Meaning you wire the money tomorrow, three days for it to get to my account. I don't want to be behind on the rent. Mom never was. And I can't work, I've got to go to school. Go to college.'

'I can't get it that quick,' he protested. Kate noted how he didn't ask her about college, about her dreams. He didn't give a damn.

'OK, Daddy. Guess I'll see you on Tuesday.'

'Fine. You'll get the money.'

'If I don't, you're going to find yourself all over the front page of the local paper, and in court. Oh, and looking after me till I turn eighteen. It's a deal, Father. Jump on it.'

She hung up.

The money turned up in her account on Friday, buffering the paltry bit of cash Mom had had left over at the end of the month. It was enough; two years' rent, to see her through to eighteen, and whatever came next.

For the first time in her life, Kate Fox felt a little bit of power.

It was there, in between all the sadness, like a dandelion poking up through a paving stone. She'd taken on her little weasel of a father and she'd crushed him. And one phone call had gotten her what she needed. She thought how proud her mother would be.

They still had the plan. No way was Kate going to waste what Mom had done for her, what she'd fought for all these years. It was a sacred compact; she was sticking to it.

She took a little out of her account and walked it over to her landlord, paid him in cash, got a written receipt. Then she went home. On Monday she was back at school, working hard. Harder than she ever had before.