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opening extract from

Summer of Secrets

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CHAPTER 1

'No one would have supposed her born to be a heroine . . .'
(Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*)

'SO CAN I? CAN I COME OVER TO YOUR PLACE ON SATURDAY?' Izzy Thorpe pranced over to Caitlin, who was sprawled on one of the beanbags in the Day Den and gazed down at her with sea-green eyes as wistful as if she'd been some poor, homeless kid longing for a bed for the night, instead of the daughter of a cabinet minister and a woman whose knitwear designs were sought after by the glitterati of the world.

'To my place?' Caitlin asked, looking up reluctantly from her new copy of *Goss* magazine and raising her voice above the babble of Year Eleven students crashing in for morning break. It wasn't that she didn't want to spend time with Izzy – in fact, she couldn't wait to build on this new friendship. It was just that she'd rather do it anywhere other than in her own home. She had spent the past three weeks trying to create the right image here at Mulberry Court and she wasn't about to blow it now.

Getting the Hector Oliver Art Scholarship was just

the start, she knew it was: the gateway to the sort of life she had always known she was destined to lead. In the three weeks she'd been on the induction programme for the following term's Sixth Form intake, she'd realised that to make friends with these guys would be her passport to better things.

'Caitlin!' Izzy prodded her in the ribs impatiently. 'So is it a deal? I can't wait to meet your family!'

'Why?' Caitlin thought it was a perfectly reasonable question, given the nature of her nearest and dearest.

'*Why?*' echoed Summer Tilney, brushing past her and grabbing a paper cup from the stack by the water cooler. 'Use your head. She's been gagging to get to your place for days.'

Caitlin sighed inwardly and tossed her magazine to one side, resigned to having to wait to discover the identity of the secret love of reality-show star Lisa Loretta. Clearly, Izzy had no idea what it was like to share a ramshackle house with four brothers and sisters, two dogs, a variety of cats, gerbils, mice and chickens and a couple of parents who had clearly been absent when anything approaching style or finesse was being handed out. Her father earned shed loads of money, she was sure of that; but he was so busy saving for what he called a 'rainy day' that none of it got spent on anything remotely relevant to an upmarket lifestyle.

Compared with everyone else she'd met at MC, her life was without doubt the most boring and unsophisticated. Summer, who played three instruments and sang like an angel, was the daughter of the marmalade

magnate, Sir Magnus Tilney; Isabella's dad was an MP and he and her mum were in and out of the news on a monthly basis; and Bianca Joseph's mum was an ageing rock diva with her own Lear jet and houses in three continents. Even the kids whose parents weren't so high profile seemed to live fascinating lives in which every weekend was spent sussing out the latest clubs or dashing between divorced parents and ripping off both sides for new clothes and the latest MP3 players.

Which made it all the more unfair that someone like her – someone with passion and sensitivity and a deep connectedness to the finer things of life – should be afflicted with a family who could win Oscars for dullness. Sometimes she wondered whether her mother, who was, after all, absent-minded at the best of times, had picked the wrong baby from the maternity ward and that in reality, Caitlin was from a family oozing with class and eccentricity and a total dedication to the pursuit of glamour and excitement.

Caitlin, much as she adored her parents, had to admit that they were not big on excitement. Her father was the sort of man who in the olden days would have been called 'worthy'. Edward Morland, in addition to being senior partner in the highly-respected law firm of Morland, Croft and Isingworth, sat on numerous charitable committees, campaigned in favour of traffic calming in the high street and against litter universally, drove old ladies to church (often when they didn't even want to go) and, on the rare occasions when he did something for himself, played chess. Not just on the

infrequent evening when there was nothing worth watching on TV, but for the local club and even for something called Chess42morrow, which sounded trendy but actually was all about teaching innocent little kids to learn the game and grow up to be as boring as he was.

As for her mother, Lynne Morland was the original earth-mother type: having finally given up reproducing after the unexpected arrival of child number five, she spent her time baking bread, growing organic vegetables in their garden in Ditchcombe (runner up in the Prettiest Village in Sussex competition for three years running), masterminding the local flower show and avoiding any activity that could possibly drag her into the twenty-first century. Caitlin loved her to bits, but there was no way she was about to parade her and her unfortunate dress sense in front of her new friends – especially when those friends had parents who knew how to live life to the full.

'Caitlin!' Izzy prodded her in the ribs. 'You're day-dreaming again. So I'm coming, right? I so want to sort out my party and we could do it together at yours.'

'But we all said we'd meet up in Brighton on Saturday night – and besides, we could do the party stuff at your place,' Caitlin reasoned. According to Summer, Izzy's parents were totally laid back and didn't give a toss what their kids got up to – whereas her lot could sniff out a hidden bottle of vodka a mile away and would have no shame about marching into her room at half-hourly intervals to check that she wasn't doing anything

vaguely imaginative or interesting. They didn't treat her brother like that, of course, because—

'It's Jamie, isn't it?' Caitlin burst out, as the reason for Izzy's persistence finally registered in her wandering brain. 'He's the reason you want to come over – go on, admit it.'

Izzy flushed and avoided Caitlin's gaze.

'Don't be silly – of course it's not,' she began. 'Why – will Jamie be around this weekend?'

Caitlin sighed. What it was about her brother she didn't know, but despite showing no interest in them at all, he managed to have girls prostrating themselves at his feet, whereas the story of her own love life would fill the back of a postage stamp with room to spare.

'*Will* he?' Izzy couldn't hide the eagerness in her voice.

Caitlin shrugged.

'Haven't a clue,' she replied. 'He's a law unto himself. But I guess if I tell him you're coming . . .'

'No way! Don't you dare!' Izzy screamed. 'I so don't want him to think that I—'

'Fancy him like crazy?' Summer interrupted, gulping down the last of her water and tossing the cup into the bin. 'Or was that yesterday? We all know that you fall in and out of love more often than the rest of us touch up our lip-gloss.'

'I do not! And besides, do you *have* to reduce every emotion to the lowest common denominator?' Izzy retorted, pulling a face at Summer. 'I don't *fancy* him – that is such adolescent terminology.'

Summer shook her head, raised a perfectly arched eyebrow, but said nothing.

'I just think he's a really interesting guy,' Izzy finished lamely, surveying a broken fingernail with distaste.

'When Izzy says a guy is interesting,' Summer whispered in Caitlin's ear, 'it means two things. One, she's got the hots for him and two, she's about to make mincemeat of him. When she has this party of hers just make sure you don't let *your* boyfriend anywhere near her, OK?'

Caitlin smiled what she hoped was an enigmatic smile and turned to gather up her magazines and grab her text books. She wasn't about to admit that she didn't have a boyfriend, or even a friend who was a boy right now. If she had been glamorous like Izzy, who, with flawless skin and hair the colour of liquorice, looked like a gypsy princess out of some Offenbach operetta, or dainty like Summer – whose skin was so pale that it seemed transparent and who reminded Caitlin of that poem about fairies with gossamer wings – she might have had more luck on the guy front. But she was what her mother called 'chunky', had auburn hair that fought her hair straighteners every morning and won, and such a healthy, freckled complexion that no one believed she was ill, even when she felt at death's door.

Despite these drawbacks, however, she was basically an optimist and she was pinning all her hopes on next term. Mulberry Court, a rambling grey-stone building nestling in a cleft of the South Downs in Sussex and advertised as 'the Country's Foremost Independent School Specialising in Expressive Arts', had started taking boys in the Sixth Form and she hoped that she

could do some hands-on expressing with the two she'd got in her sights – Fergus Walker and Charlie Ditton. She had earmarked the summer holiday for losing weight, getting lowlights and becoming sophisticated; and she thought that in addition perhaps she would ask Izzy's advice about getting boys to come on to her. Certainly, Izzy's techniques seemed to be working on Jamie.

She sighed to herself, recalling that first morning three weeks earlier when Jamie had agreed to drop her off at school – not through any sense of brotherly love and duty, but because he'd just returned from three months in Australia and wanted to give his battered MG Midget a burn-up. Caitlin had been battling to open the passenger door – Jamie hadn't got round to fixing anything that wasn't under the bonnet – when Izzy appeared at her elbow.

'Hi, I'm Izzy,' she had said brightly, her eyes fixed, not on Caitlin, but very firmly on Jamie's bronzed thighs, shown off to considerable advantage by his frayed denim shorts. 'Caitlin and me are best buddies.'

This statement had somewhat surprised Caitlin, since she'd only met Izzy at the scholarship interview day, during which, although she was supposed to be showing Caitlin the ropes, she'd spent more time buffing her nails and sizing up the guys in the Sixth Form than forming any lasting relationships with the newcomer.

Jamie, who was usually more given to grunts than whole sentences, had treated her to a lopsided grin, said 'Hi, Izzy, good to know you,' and then thrown the gear

stick and roared off, his macho departure being only slightly spoiled by the necessity of stopping after ten metres to avoid a double-decker bus.

'*Where*,' Izzy had gasped, grabbing Caitlin by the wrist, 'did you find him? That is one seriously divine guy.'

'Divine? Jamie? Be serious,' Caitlin had said, laughing.

'You mean – he's not your boyfriend?' Izzy had asked.

'No way,' Caitlin had replied. 'He's my brother.'

'Oh my God!' Izzy had clamped a perfectly manicured hand to her mouth, slipped her arm through Caitlin's and begun dragging her towards the imposing entrance of Mulberry Court. 'What are you going to think of me? I mean, I thought he was your guy and I was just trying to – well, you know – be friendly and stuff.'

She had kicked open the double doors.

'Lovely necklace, by the way,' she had remarked, gesturing at Caitlin's pendant. 'I wish I had more junky stuff – all mine's *real*, and wearing it here would be so in your face, know what I mean? OK, now this is the Day Den – or common room, to the rest of the world. Shove your stuff over there. By the way, your brother – has he got a regular girlfriend?'

Caitlin had shaken her head.

'Nobody serious – he spends most of his time messing around with cars,' she had sighed. 'Why?'

'Oh – no reason,' Izzy had assured her. 'Just showing an interest.'

Izzy had continued to show an interest at regular intervals ever since, which was quite clearly, Caitlin

thought, as she stuffed her magazines into her bag, why she was so keen to come over on Saturday. More surprisingly, Jamie appeared to have noticed her friend as well; he had insisted on driving Caitlin to school several times in the past couple of weeks, albeit on the excuse that the car needed some fine tuning; he had gone through the 'Ciao, Izzy – see ya around!' stage, to the 'How's your mate Izzy? She seems kinda cool,' stage every evening, and the previous day he'd actually winked at Izzy as he drove off, which, while not being the greatest come-on by some people's standards, was as good as a declaration of intent for Caitlin's reticent brother. And clearly, Izzy had got the message and had decided it was time to go in for the kill.

'So that's settled,' Izzy gabbled, as the bell rang. 'I'll pitch up on Saturday – we can still make Brighton for the evening – we'll sort out the party and get Jamie to come along with a few of his mates and—'

'Jamie? You're going to ask him to your party?' Caitlin gasped.

'And you tried to pretend you don't fancy him?' added Summer.

Izzy gave them both a long-suffering stare.

'I'm doing it for *Caitlin*,' she said graciously. 'She doesn't know many people, and having Jamie there will make it easier for her. What's the matter? Why are you laughing?'

'And what strikes you about this picture?'

Robina Cathcart, the new history of art tutor, zapped

the button on her laptop and *The Three Graces* filled the screen on the studio wall.

'Serious cellulite!' Izzy called out, pointing at the three naked ladies of more than ample proportions. The entire room collapsed in fits of giggles. Izzy made no secret of the fact that art was not her thing; she was the school's drama queen in more ways than one.

'That is not funny,' Mrs Cathcart said, her huge jade earrings tinkling as she shook her head impatiently, causing wisps of bottle-blond hair to escape from her chignon.

'No, you're quite right, Mrs Cathcart – cellulite is certainly no laughing matter,' Bianca Joseph added with mock solemnity.

'As, indeed, she should know,' whispered Izzy, nudging Caitlin in the ribs.

'Is there anyone in this room who can think of a single intelligent thing to say about Rubens's work?' Mrs Cathcart demanded. 'How about our new art scholar? Caitlin?'

'Me?' Caitlin looked alarmed. This was only her second lesson in history of art, and she was feeling distinctly out of her depth. The practical stuff, such as photography, painting, doing caricatures of her mates – all of that came easily to her; but when it came to comparing and contrasting the work of Monet and Van Gogh, or identifying a fragment of an Italian fresco, she was lost. Everyone else in the room, it seemed, had toured the art galleries of Europe or thought nothing of owning the odd Constable or Whistler. Her parents' idea of a family holiday was a cottage on the Isle of Wight

and all that bedecked the walls of Caitlin's home were ceramic plates and framed photographs of the Morland children at every stage of their development.

'Yes, you,' the tutor encouraged. 'Tell us what you see.'

Caitlin swallowed hard.

'Well,' she began, peering more closely at the picture, 'obviously the woman in the middle is really having a hard time of it – I guess she's being bullied by the other two. They're pretending to be oh-so-nice, of course, but you can see they are really laying into her – criticising her figure and all that. See how they are gripping her arms, not letting her get away. I guess probably she's used her magical powers as a goddess or whatever to win the affection of some nobleman that they're after and that's why . . .'

She stopped dead. Half the class had swivelled round in their seats and were eyeing her with a mixture of astonishment and outright hilarity.

'All right, Caitlin, you've had your joke,' Mrs Cathcart said wearily. 'Now would you please give us the facts about the picture. When was it painted?'

'Um – quite a long time ago?' Caitlin ventured.

'For heaven's sake, girl – how come we gave you a scholarship?'

Caitlin felt a dozen pairs of eyes fixed on her, waiting for her next *faux pas*. Get this wrong, and she'd be labelled an ineffectual wimp and the cool set would be closed to her for ever. Even Summer, who normally kept her eyes down and worked like a swot, seemed to be egging her on to say something more incriminating.

'I guess because I'm pretty ace at drawing; because my photographic portfolio was wacky and off the wall and because when I'm a top designer, it won't matter a toss whether I know when some stupid man obsessed with fat women was born!'

For a moment you could have heard a pin drop. Mrs Cathcart's ample breasts heaved in unison, her poppy red lips pursed together and Caitlin just knew that she had totally blown it. She'd be expelled before she'd even started and then her family would be able to smile in satisfaction and say it was all for the best and she should have kept her feet firmly on the ground.

'All right, point taken!' Mrs Cathcart smiled despite herself. 'You're right – well, up to a point, anyway. You *do* have tremendous artistic talent, and there'll be plenty of opportunities for me to drum some of the finer points of art history into you. A task which will clearly take some time. In fact – you've given me an idea.'

A groan rippled round the room.

'Her ideas always mean hard work for us,' said Izzy. 'Thanks a bunch, Caitlin.'

'An assignment,' Mrs Cathcart began.

'You can't – it's practically the end of term!' Bianca protested.

'We'd never have time to do it justice,' Izzy added emphatically.

'It's a holiday assignment,' Mrs Cathcart replied smugly. 'I'm calling it *Art in My Imagination* and . . .'

'We don't *have* holiday assignments,' Summer burst out. 'When we had Mr Brington, he never gave us

anything to do after the end of term.'

'Did he not? Well, I do,' said Mrs Cathcart, smiling calmly. 'As I was saying, I want you all to seek out one piece of art wherever you go on holiday this summer and let it speak to you – the way Caitlin, however misguidedly, let *The Three Graces* fire her imagination. Paint, draw, photograph anything and everything that the original painting or sculpture leads you to think about. Make up stories, poems . . .'

She beamed round the room, clearly chuffed at her own inventiveness.

'And then I want you to find out where the artist *really* got his inspiration – myths, legends, unrequited passion – and compare the two. Should be fascinating.'

'Oh, riveting,' muttered Bianca, as Mrs Cathcart turned away and packed up her laptop. 'Like she really thinks I'm going to find a load of art galleries in the Maldives. Get real.'

The Isle of Wight isn't exactly spilling over with masterpieces either, Caitlin thought.

'I'll expect a portfolio from each of you at the start of next term,' Mrs Cathcart concluded. 'Good morning, ladies!'

'I shan't know where to begin,' Caitlin moaned as she made her way to lunch with Bianca, Summer and Izzy. 'I've never done anything like this before.'

'It could be quite fun,' Summer mused.

'It could be quite fun,' Bianca imitated. 'Compared to what? Watching paint dry?'

'Compared to spending the whole holiday . . . oh, forget it!'

'Go on,' Caitlin urged.

'I said, forget it!' Summer turned away and stomped over to the food counter.

'Is she OK, do you think?' Caitlin asked anxiously, watching as Summer grabbed a tuna salad. Falling out with one of the few friends she'd made would not be a good idea right now, and secretly she thought Summer fascinatingly mysterious.

'She'll be fine,' Izzy replied confidently. 'She's like that – starts to tell you something and then clams up like she's hiding a state secret. I guess it's – well, you know, what with her father and everything.'

'What about him?' Caitlin asked eagerly.

'Well, there's a rumour going round that he's got – hang on, she'll hear us,' Izzy muttered, and then raised her voice as they caught up with Summer. 'Hey, how about we hit the shops after school? You up for it, Summer?'

Summer shook her head.

'No thanks,' she replied. 'Ludo's got tickets for a jazz concert – sorry.'

She pushed past them and headed for a table in the far corner of the dining hall.

'Who's Ludo – her boyfriend?' Caitlin asked.

'Boyfriend? Summer? Hardly!' Izzy retorted, grabbing a cheese and tomato roll. 'If you ask me, there's something seriously not right with her.'

'What do you mean, not right?'

'She's not into boys,' stressed Izzy. 'Or at least, in the whole two years she's been at Mulberry, I've never seen her with one. Is that odd or what?'

'You mean, she's . . .' Caitlin hesitated, not quite sure how to put it.

'I'm not saying *that*,' Izzy said. 'But she never drools over fit guys in magazines and she's not very sociable – I mean, she never throws a party or has anyone back to her place or anything. She's a real loner. She won't even commit to coming out with us lot on Saturday night.'

'So who's this Ludo?' Caitlin looked suspiciously at what passed for lasagne, before taking a jacket potato and a scoopful of coleslaw and heading over to Summer's table.

'Her brother,' Izzy said with a shrug. 'She's got two – Freddie, who's dead cool and Ludo, who isn't. They're twins, although you'd never know it. Apparently they've both been bumming round Europe on a gap year, lucky sods.'

'Hardly bumming in Ludo's case!' Summer looked up as they reached her table, apparently recovered from her fleeting fit of pique. 'Freddie's the bumming expert – most of the time Ludo's been at Casa Vernazza, learning the ropes.'

'Casa what?' asked Caitlin.

'Oh – it's our house in Italy,' Summer replied, nibbling on a black olive. 'We've got this vineyard in Begasti – it's near Monterosso and it used to belong to my grandparents. Freddie's not remotely interested, so Dad's got it into his head that Ludo will take it over one day.'

'You own a vineyard? That is so amazing!' Caitlin

gasped, anxious to restore normal relations. 'Just like that movie – what's it called? *Under the Tuscan Sun*.'

'It sounds a lot grander than it is – it hardly makes any money at the moment. It is lovely, though – well, it was until . . . Hey, is that the time? I've got to dash – piano lesson.'

With that she pushed her half-eaten salad to one side and almost ran out of the room.

'She is *so* lucky,' breathed Caitlin. 'Just imagine living in Italy, surrounded by all that history and art and romance.'

'Like I said, Summer doesn't do romance,' said Izzy. 'Talking of which . . . what time shall I come to yours on Saturday?'