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Opening extract from

Love, Lies and Lemon Pies

Written by

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ABOUT THE RECIPES

The recipes in this book are intended as inspiration. Think of them as a starting point on your baking journey. As Lottie, Mac and the gang learn new techniques, tricks and bakes, I hope you will too. But there's an awful lot more to baking than could fit inside these pages! Experiment with new ingredients and different methods. And I hope you'll research any unfamiliar baking terms or techniques and give them a go.

If you're looking for extra information, there is a world of cookery books and online baking sites at your disposal!

Most of all, I hope your bakes are delicious, and that you share them with your friends and family … and me! I'd love to see photos too.

Katy x

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WHAT YOU NEED TO START

A mixing bowl.

A wooden spoon.

A baking tray or tin.

A recipe.

Some ingredients.

And an oven.

There's lots of baking equipment out there, much of it helpful, some of it not. But when you're just starting out, you don't really need any of it. Baking is something everyone can do. All you really need to begin baking is enthusiasm. And a place to cook…

Home is a funny word.

It means different things to different people. Everyone believes that the way they live, the way their family do things, that's normal. Whatever anyone else does? Just plain weird.

Maybe that means we're all normal, in our own way. And maybe we're all a little bit freakish as well.

Still, say "home" to a group and ask them to define it, and you'll get as many different responses as there are people.

Once they move past the "somewhere to live" thing, and "my family, of course", that's when you start to get the real answers. The ones that matter.

Belonging. Comfort. Relaxation. Space.

For some people, it's a colour. For others, it's the smell of chocolate chip cookies baking. Or the sound of a favourite band blaring out of the radio.

For Grace, it's having somebody else there before her, waiting to welcome her home. For Jasper, a safe,

dark cocoon, where he can be entirely himself – whoever that is today. For Yasmin, summer sun on her skin and space to breathe. For Ella, the scent of her gran's lavender perfume.

Mac claimed home was loud music, the stink of oil and the feel of metal under his fingertips. He was lying, but it took us a while to figure that out.

For me? Home is a kitchen. Long clear work surfaces of stainless steel or gleaming wood. Tiny bowls of weighed ingredients, laid out ready for me to mix and fold, stir and create. A shiny silver mixer and cookie cutters in every shape you can imagine.

In my head, I'm a world-famous baker, with people queuing for miles just for a taste of one of my strawberry cupcakes. I'm on the cover of every food magazine, when I'm not busy starring in my own cookery programme.

I know, I know. You don't have to tell me. I'm strange. Especially for a sixteen-year-old girl.

Anyway, the point is, a year ago I didn't know what home was any more. Now I do, thanks to Bake Club. And Mac.



GINGER SNAPS

Open packet.

Place on plate.

Serve to unsuspecting students.

The last time I was waiting outside the Head of Year's office was with all the other Junior and Senior Prefects, ready to receive our shiny badges of responsibility. This time, I hadn't got a clue what I was there for, but I had a feeling it wouldn't end with a shiny badge.

Of course, it could be worse. I wasn't the only one waiting outside the office that day, and I guessed the guy sitting across from me was in a lot more trouble than I was.

I'd like to pretend that I didn't know instantly who he was, but Will Macintyre wasn't someone who went unnoticed at our school, even if we hadn't spent four years in the same junior school class. We'd never had classes together since we started secondary school, but he wasn't someone you forgot.

Will Macintyre, Mac to practically the whole school, slumped in the chair opposite me, glaring at his hands. His dark curls fell over his forehead,

and he looked as if he were contemplating his future. Which, given what little I knew of Mac, didn't seem very likely.

He looked up, and I wasn't quick enough to look away before he caught me staring. He raised an eyebrow. "Wouldn't expect to see you here. Junior Prefect, and all."

Were those the first words he'd said to me in the past four years? Probably. Guys like Mac didn't talk to girls like me.

He leaned back in his chair when I didn't respond, stretching out his legs in front of him as he eyed me. Just not answering had served me well for the last year. I found eventually people gave up and left me alone.

But not Mac, apparently. Not yet, anyway.

"You're probably here to pick up some award, right? Top marks for everything, or whatever."

I looked away, but didn't answer. Given that my last English essay had only just scraped a B minus, that didn't seem likely.

"Or maybe you have regular chats with our Head of Year," Mac went on. "Filling him in on all the latest gossip, catching up."

He was trying to get a rise from me now. But I'd had a lot more practice at this than him.

Still, maybe it was time to turn the tables.

"What about you?" I asked. "What are you here for today? I mean, as opposed to yesterday. Or every other day. Burn down something new?"

A smile spread across his face.

"So you do know how to talk. I heard people were beginning to think you'd forgotten."

I stared up at the ceiling. I didn't care what people were saying about me. And I had no idea why he of all people was listening to the gossip. "I talk when it's worth my time."

"I'm worth your time?" Mac said, in mock astonishment. "I'm flattered."

I rolled my eyes and looked away. Mac *didn't* matter to me. Maybe that was why I started talking to him. He wasn't part of my world. His friends weren't people I'd hung around with even before the last year. Now I didn't really hang around with anyone. The chances of our lives intersecting again seemed slim. I had two and a half terms left of Year Eleven, and the last half term of that would be study leave and GCSEs. Then I'd be on to sixth form which, at St Mary's at least, seemed like a whole different world.

"You didn't answer my question," I pointed out. "What are you here for?"

"You didn't answer mine, either." Mac folded his hands behind his head and waited.

I looked down at my neatly filed nails. "I heard you smashed up the woodwork room."

Mac's smile widened. "Is that what they're saying? Hell, yeah, I'll take that."

"So it's not true?"

"It's close enough for this school," Mac said.

Which wasn't saying much. St Mary's Secondary School loved a rumour. And I should know. I'd heard enough of them about me and my family over the last year. Of course, none of them hit anywhere near the truth.

"Lottie?" Mr Carroll stuck his head round the door of his office. "Come on in."

Smoothing down my school skirt as I stood, I tried to dismiss Mac from my mind as I entered the tiny room. Mr Carroll was already back behind his desk, stacks of papers and exercise books covering most of the surface between us, and a plate of ginger snap biscuits balanced on top of them.

"Sit down," he said, smiling as if we were friends, as if this were an everyday occurrence. Which it really, really wasn't. "Biscuit?"

Biting my lip, I shook my head, trying to stop my mind from whirling, to think of a reason for the

Head of Year to call me in. My first panicked response had been that something bad had happened. But then I realized if that was the case, he wouldn't have casually asked me to stop by at lunchtime when he saw me in the corridor that morning. I knew exactly what happened when there was a real tragedy. The school secretary, with her big sad eyes, showed up at your classroom, and took you out to where the Head was waiting. I knew because it had happened to me a year ago.

"I'm sure you've got an idea why I asked you to come in today," Mr Carroll said, selecting a ginger snap from the plate.

I stayed quiet. I didn't think *I haven't a clue* was the answer he was looking for.

Unfazed by my lack of response, Mr Carroll sat back in his chair and studied me, exactly as Mac had done. The comparison made me want to laugh, but that probably wasn't the reaction Mr Carroll wanted, either.

"I've had a number of your teachers speak to me over the last few months," he said after a moment. "All concerned about you."

"I'm fine," I said. My default answer in these situations.

Mr Carroll flipped open a file. "You've dropped

out of all your after-school activities, even the band. You've given up your Junior Prefect duties, which makes your chances of being appointed a Senior Prefect in sixth form slim. You've stopped volunteering at school fundraisers, stopped taking part in events and assemblies."

"That's because my GCSEs are coming up," I said. "My mum and I thought I should focus on my school work." It was almost the truth. Mum probably hadn't noticed I'd dropped anything. But the focus part was true. I needed good grades if I wanted to get away from home and do … something.

"Which would be admirable, except your grades are erratic too." Mr Carroll's eyebrows furrowed slightly as he read through my file, chewing on his biscuit. "Even in subjects you've always loved and excelled at. Your teachers say you seem to have lost enthusiasm for everything."

"It's been a hard year," I said, and stared straight at him, watching as he fumbled to turn the page. "I'm sure you can appreciate why I might be feeling a little less enthusiastic than normal."

"Of course," he said. "You know how very sorry we are for your loss. And, as a community, the school has tried to be as supportive as it can since your father … passed. But…"

There was a "but"? How could there be a "but"? Mine had to be the best possible reason for not wanting to get stuck into school shows and harvest fairs. How could they possibly expect those things to matter to me when Dad was dead?

"But we're worried about you," Mr Carroll finished, and I felt some of my annoyance fade.

"I'm fine," I repeated, a bit more firmly this time, and reached for a ginger snap, as if that would prove it.

"Are you?" Leaning forward to rest his elbows on the desk, Mr Carroll gave me a solemn, concerned look. "Lottie, you've been through more than any teenager should have to this past year. It's understandable that you might look at school, and life, and people differently. But turning inward isn't the answer. When times are hard, you need people around you, you need support and friendship and help."

Obviously Mr Carroll had no idea exactly how unhelpful my friends had been, letting me push them away because they couldn't cope with me and my grief. But I didn't need them. Besides, friends weren't the problem. The problem was that I spent so long trying to make every assignment perfect, re-copying my notes until they were flawless, that I ran out of time to do everything. Which usually left

me with one or two model assignments, and four or five rushed ones.

"I've spoken with your form tutor, and she confirms that you've been withdrawn for months now. Maybe even depressed. She said you'd lost weight…"

"I have not!" I took a defiant bite of my biscuit.

"Well, regardless. I spoke to the school guidance counsellor, and she agreed that you could benefit from some sessions with her."

I felt the first pangs of panic in my chest, but when I started to object, Mr Carroll simply held up his hand and spoke over me. "I know you saw a counsellor last year, but I think talking to someone again could help, now some time has passed."

"I don't need a counsellor," I said. "I'm fine."

Mr Carroll sighed. "No, Lottie, you're not."

"So this is compulsory?"

"Until we can see that you're interacting more, being part of the school again, putting effort into your classes… Yes, I'm afraid it is."

I searched for an argument, something I could use to stop this, but came up blank. Apparently just telling people I was fine wasn't proof enough any more.

"Mrs Tyler, the counsellor, also suggested that it

might be worthwhile for her to talk to your mum. Either here at the school or, if it's more comfortable, maybe at your house?"

"No!"

That absolutely could not happen. Ever.

I don't know if the horror I felt came across in my voice, but Mr Carroll obviously saw a weakness and latched on to it.

"Mrs Tyler has very close ties to social services," he went on, watching me carefully. "Even if you don't think you need to talk to someone, perhaps your mum does. After all, she lost someone as well."

And she gained so much more. The joke bubbled up and I swallowed down my urge to laugh hysterically. This was serious. This was dangerous.

I needed a way out. A way to convince them I was fine.

Chewing on the inside of my cheek, I called on my Drama Club training – another abandoned hobby – to act unhappy but resigned. Mr Carroll needed to believe I was opening up to him, even if really I wasn't.

"Mr Carroll, look. I know I've been a bit … distracted lately. And I know that this year is important, and I need to get my grades back up. But it's been really hard reconnecting with my

friends, after everything." I paused for maximum effect before saying, "I know I have to … move on, eventually. I just don't think I can go back to being exactly who I was before."

I glanced up to see if he was buying it and, behind his softening features, I spotted a flyer pinned to his noticeboard. That flyer changed the whole year for me. It had a picture of a cupcake, decorated with jolly pink sprinkles, and the words *Bake Club* in a curly font underneath. Suddenly I remembered Miss Anderson talking about the new club she was starting, for Year Tens and Elevens who wanted to learn to bake, even if they weren't taking food tech GCSE.

"I want to start something new," I said, looking at him with conviction. "Which is why I thought I'd join the new Bake Club after half-term."

"The Bake Club?" Disbelief coloured Mr Carroll's voice.

"Absolutely," I said, beginning to warm to the idea. "My dad and I always used to bake together. It's something I've really missed this year." A good dose of truth to help convince him. I had missed baking. And when Miss Anderson had announced the new club I'd thought, just for a moment, about joining. Before the thought of actually having to deal

with other people put me off. Still, if I had to convince the school that I was a normal girl with interests and hobbies, Bake Club could work. It was new, so I wouldn't be walking into a group that already had its own cliques and rules. And it was being run by Miss Anderson, the new food technology teacher who'd just moved from America at the start of the year, who I liked.

And, on top of everything else, it would give me an excuse to stay away from home for an hour or two longer, at least one day a week. An advantage not to be ignored.

"It might even help me with my food tech GCSE," I added.

"Well, that's … good, then." Mr Carroll frowned again. "But I still want you to keep these appointments with Mrs Tyler." He handed me a slip of paper with some times printed on it and a room number.

I took the paper with reluctance. In the space of ten minutes, I'd become the guidance counsellor's pet project, as well as a wannabe baker. But as long as it kept her – and social services – out of my house, I wasn't going to complain.

Dismissed at last, I walked out of the office, Mr Carroll following close behind. I heard him sigh as he opened the door to stare out at Mac.

"Mr Macintyre," he said wearily. "You'd better come in."

I raised my eyebrows at Mac, who casually got to his feet as if he were doing Mr Carroll a favour by being there at all. "Have fun," I said.

He rolled his eyes. "Yeah, sure. Maybe they'll even kick me out this time."

Maybe they would. Maybe his luck had run out and whatever he'd done would be enough to get him expelled.

But it wasn't.

And it turned out I'd just given Mr Carroll a much better idea for Mac's punishment.



CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

1. *Heat the oven to 180°C/fan 160°C/gas 4.*
2. *Cream together 125g of softened unsalted butter and 200g of light muscovado sugar in a bowl using a mixer, or wooden spoon.*
3. *Mix in 1 tsp of vanilla extract and a lightly beaten egg.*
4. *Sift in 200g of plain flour, ½ tsp of baking powder and a pinch of salt.*
5. *Stir until just combined, then fold through 200g of chocolate chips.*
6. *Place spoonfuls of cookie mixture on to a greased and lined baking tray, making sure to leave room for spreading.*
7. *Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, until they turn a pale golden colour.*