



BOOK EXTRACT

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Chapter 3 The X Factor

It was 2005 and nearing my 30th birthday and I wanted to do something special; after all you don't turn 30 every day. So I decided at the last minute that, instead of having a party, I would have dinner at a restaurant with my closest friends and family. I have always preferred smaller more intimate settings in any case so I booked Cottons, a Caribbean restaurant in Camden, London. I hadn't had a West Indian meal in a long time since mum fell sick, so Cottons was the perfect choice.

A few days before I received a letter from Thames Television with my audition date for *The X Factor* – 24th May. I couldn't believe it - my birthday. I wasn't sure whether or not to go because I had planned to spend the day with Lawrence and then go on to Cottons in the evening. It was such a crazy coincidence. Maybe it was a sign that I shouldn't go, or that something significant was about to happen in my life. I didn't know what to do.

The morning of my birthday arrived and I was still undecided but it turned out that Lawrence had to work and I was free during the day. At the last minute, I decided to get ready and head down to Wembley Conference Centre where the auditions were being held. I called my sister Brenda and my mum to see if they were up for coming along with me. I didn't want to go alone, as everyone else turns

up with family and friends for support because getting through the audition can be quite nerve-racking.

Mum had made a great recovery so far and was by this time back to her normal self, fussing to make sure that I ate before the audition and expressing concern that I was losing weight. She always worries if I'm not eating right and taking care of myself. But she was back and I felt so privileged to have her by my side at such an exciting time in my life. It is still a bonus every time I hear her voice. Even when she is moaning or nagging, I find it comforting these days because it reminds me that I still have my mum.

I almost feel like I have been given a second chance in order to make a difference in her life and give her all of the things she never had. She struggled for so long and now I want to make sure that she never has to worry again.

I arrived at Wembley and the crowds were already there. It was huge; so many people turned up to try their luck at stardom. Out of all these thousands of people, I wondered what I could do to stand out for the judges and persuade them to put me through. How could I be seen to be special amongst all those girls in their hottest outfits, trendy girl groups and well turned out boy bands. I was wearing ripped jeans tucked into my boots and a black top. I wished that I had made more of an effort. People were rehearsing and showcasing their talent in the queue. It was all a little daunting for me. Everyone looked like tough competition and I was extremely nervous.

We were eventually invited into the waiting area which was warm and had refreshments, a welcome relief as I didn't want my mum, sister and little niece Isabel standing out in the cold for too long.

Then I realised that I had forgotten to bring my passport and you need it as proof of your identity and age. The lady at the counter explained that without proof, you can't enter. I lived an hour away by car. There was no way I could have driven all the way home to get my passport and still have made it back on time. The audition was in 20 minutes. I asked her if there was anyone I could call to verify who I was and she agreed to speak to my bank who kindly confirmed my identity and date of birth. Somehow God was on my side and knew I had to do this audition no matter what.