

Chapter 1

Sorry. That's all it takes – just one word and she's off on one.

“Dad,” Jess says, stretching out his name. “You're not sorry at all.” She furrows her brow. “This *always* happens.”

Then she does this toddler thing of shoving out her bottom lip until, geez, she looks so bloomin' daft that I need to stuff a hand over my mouth to squash the snigger that's threatening to burst out.

But my sis must have the hearing of a bat because she wheels round to me and says, “I don't know why you're laughing, Minty, you were looking forward to it as much as me.”

There's more than a spark of annoyance in her eyes. Crikey, she *has* got the hump.

Before I get the chance to think of something to calm her down, Dad butts in. “Girls, I really am sorry. I hate having to do this to you but...that phone call...” He glances at the mobile in his hand. “There's a problem with the network this morning and I might have to go in if they can't fix it.”

Jess plucks at the fringes on her stripy scarf. “Why can't someone else do it? Why's it always you?”

He pulls on an ear, screws up his nose. “It's not as simple as that. Look, I know you're disappointed but it just can't be helped. I'll make it up to you, though. Promise. I'll take you to Edinburgh next Saturday. Then you can look at all the Roman artefacts you want.”

I smile back at him cos, well, it's not as if he planned for the computers to act up or anything, is it?

Jess tugs off her scarf, bundles it into an untidy ball and throws it on the kitchen table. "I bet you don't. I bet there'll be another problem at work and you'll call off...again." She pulls out a chair and plonks herself down, elbows on the table, and rests her chin on her fists. "And anyway, I don't see why you can't just let us go to Edinburgh on our own, like normal parents would."

I sit down beside her. "Don't be a diva, J," I whisper into her ear. "It's no big deal. What's another seven days?"

Mum breezes into the kitchen in a cloud of her latest perfume. "All ready for the off?" she says, her voice slicing through the strained atmosphere in the room. Then she checks out our faces and her smile falters. "All right," she says, "What's up?"

Not giving Jess a chance to tell it her way, I say, "Change of plan. We're going next week instead."

Mum frowns. "Why?"

"It's OK though." I elbow J in the arm. "Isn't it?" I add, under my breath.

Jess doesn't say anything, although the tight set of her mouth seems to relax a bit.

Dad holds up his phone, smiles sheepishly. "Work called. Bit of a crisis, I'm afraid. They reckon they should have it sorted by lunchtime but I need to stay in Fife in case I have to pop in."

Mum tuts. "Oh, Geoff, no. What about our outing?"

"Sorry, Mary, it can't be helped."

I fidget with the garnet on my pinkie ring. Catch the look that passes between my parents, one that I can't quite read. Then Mum claps her hands and her face brightens with a grin that's about as genuine as an Essex girl's boobs. "Oh well, never mind." She glances at Dad and turns to us. "Why don't we make it a girls' day out instead? The museum, a long girlie lunch, maybe a little shopping – we'll have lots of fun."

"I don't want to go anywhere now," Jess says. She bends down and rubs at the scuffed toe on one of her Uggs.

"Jess," I hiss. "Quit acting like a five-year-old. Get a grip."

She straightens up and stares at me. "Count me out."

"Why're you being like this?" I say, pushing the leather bracelets up my left wrist.

"You go if you want to. I'm staying here."

"I want you to come."

"Why? Are we Siamese twins now?" she snaps. "We're not joined at the hip – even if we are twins."

"Stop being an eedjit. We do everything together—"

"Well maybe that's the problem," she says in an undertone. "Maybe I just want a break from the Jess and Minty show. Maybe for once in my fourteen years I want to do something on my own. Or have something that just belongs to me." She glares at me. Her cheeks are flushed. "Me. Jess."

"And what's that meant to mean?" I say, feeling the heat rise in my own face.

I glance across at Mum and Dad, wondering if they're listening, but they're having a murmured 'conversation' of their own.

Jess lets out a sigh, and slicks her silky locks into a makeshift updo. Then, looking out from under her thick brown lashes, she says, “Sorry. Forget I said it. I’m just being a grump.” A look of apology flits across her face. She reaches out, her mass of dark hair tumbling over her shoulders, and traces the veins under my skin until my hand tickles. “I can be such a cow, can’t I?”

We smile. I’m a bit pissed though. Why would she say those things? What’s wrong with the – what’s that she called it – yeah, the Jess and Minty show?

Mum comes over, butting into my thoughts so I push Jess’s words aside for now. She takes off her Red or Dead distance glasses, pops them into her Radley bag and says, “Dad and I have been talking. Fancy taking the dogs to Elie this afternoon? The four of us?”

Dad joins in. “Don’t worry, we’ll still be going to that museum of yours. Next weekend. And no calling off this time. That’s a promise. Now, what about that walk? We could set off after lunch. How does that sound?”

Jess looks at me and I catch that twinkle of devilment behind her eyes that I know so well. Turning to Dad, she says, all coy-like, “But what about the restaurant, the Italian meal you said we’d have? We were sooo looking forward to that.” She grins, winks at me. “Weren’t we, Minty?”

Ata girl, J! I’ll say this for my sister – she doesn’t stay in a mood for long.

“Yeah, we’ve been thinking of nothing else all week,” I say, and wink back.

With a smile flickering over his mouth, Dad pulls his car keys from the pocket of his navy chinos and, jiggling them in one hand, says, “You’ll still get that. Meantime why don’t we pick up some pizza later for dinner tonight on the way home?”

“Nice one,” I say.

Yeah, Dad, good recovery – one slice and Jess won't even remember what she was narked about!

“Count me in,” I say. I can already taste the tang of pepperoni and the sweetness of pineapple on my tongue.

Jess scoots out of her seat to pat Dad's paunch. “But maybe you should stick to the salad, Dad.”

“Hey,” he says, drawing back his shoulders and sucking in his belly, his relief at being let off the hook splashed all over his face. “I'm a fine figure of a man, I'll have you know.”

She pinches the flab on his bicep. “So this isn't fat then?”

Mum snorts with laughter.

Dad tucks his mobile into his shirt pocket and chuckles. “Ha, ha! Stop it, Jess, you're cracking me up.” Then chortling to himself, he puts the keys back on their hook.

She can be a right cheeky mare, my sis. But Dad loves it really. I do, too. And that's only one of the things I love about her. And why, despite her being the most annoying girl on the entire planet at times, I flippin' couldn't exist without her.

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As it happens, Dad has to go into work for a while so it's well after three by the time we get to Elie. We're just pulling into the car park at Ruby Bay when his mobile goes off again.

“Blast,” he says and cuts the car engine, then fishes his iPhone out of his shirt pocket to check who's calling. He frowns and looks at Mum, his expression tinged with guilt. “It's work.”

“Again? I thought you said the problem was fixed?” Mum says, her immaculately-waxed eyebrows hitched skywards as she unbuckles her seatbelt.

He shoots her a half-baked smile. “I’d better take this.”

Mum sighs. “Oh, all right then, but be quick,” she snaps, and stares out of the front window, muttering to herself. “It’s late enough as it is.”

“Uh oh, someone’s not happy,” Jess whispers to me. “Think Mum’s got the hump with Dad.”

Yeah, you know all about getting the hump, don’t you, J?

I smile to myself. Bite into the banana I brought with me.

It’s then that I notice the sea with its little white horses crashing onto the sand down on the beach. So it’s no surprise when Jess opens her door and says, ‘Whoa, it’s windy!’ the second she’s outside.

I polish off my fruit, dump the skin beside my bag on the seat and clamber out, too. “Wow! You’re not wrong about the wind.” The wind whips at my face and tugs at my clothes until it finds the bare skin where my t-shirt’s ridden up. “So much for it almost being spring!” I remove a strand of hair from my mouth.

While I’m tucking my top into the waistband of my skinny jeans, I notice Jess fish a scrunchy from her jacket pocket and arrange her hair into an untidy ponytail.

Wish I’d thought to bring something to tie *my* mop back.

Mum stretches across to the back seat, opens the car and leans out to give us our jackets. “Better take these.” The breeze tugs at her door.

“I won’t bother with mine,” I say. “I don’t feel the cold.”

“Doesn’t mean to say you won’t catch your death,” Mum says and bundles them into my hands. “Now put it on. You as well, Jess.”

I pass J her scarlet zip up and slip into my red military jacket.

Holding the door steady with one hand, Mum says, “You two go on. I want to have a quick word with your dad once he’s finished his call. We’ll catch you up.”

As the door closes, Jess and I exchange looks.

“No prizes for guessing what ‘the word with Dad’s’ going to be about,” Jess says as she lifts the tailgate to release our retrievers. They leap out before it’s even halfway open.

The second their paws touch the ground, they’re off, going scatty as they run round and round the car, up onto the grass and back again. Giggling at the dog’s antics, I pull the hatch down. It shuts with a dull thud.

Once I’ve fastened the last of the oversized buttons on my jacket I hitch up the wide lapels and go to help Jess round up the dogs.

As I pass by Mum’s window she puts it down again and signals for us to come near. She gestures to the dogs then looks at us. “Girls, I want them on their leads,” she says, glancing at Dad who’s still jabbering away on the mobile.

Dad places a hand over the telephone and leans across to add his words of wisdom. “Stick to the paths. OK? We’ll be with you in a minute.” He points a thumb at his phone. “Won’t be long with this. Two minutes tops,” he says then goes back to his call.

Jess says something to him but her wisecrack is whisked away by the breeze.

Just then Remus bounds up to me and nearly knocks me over. “Yeah, yeah, Remus, I love you, too,” I say, laughing at my dippy mutt and trying to dodge his great slurping tongue as I clip on his lead. Ruffling his muzzle, we set off on our walk.

“I hope Mum and Dad aren’t going to argue,” I say, looking at the Renault Espace parked snugly in the car park while we brave the East Neuk winds.

“Nah. You know what Mum’s like: anything for a quiet life. She just gets a bit narked now and then.”

I grin. “Yeah, like someone else I could mention.”

“Watch it,” Jess says with a snigger, nudging one of my Converse trainers with the side of her boot.

By now Remus is straining at his lead so much it’s a struggle to hold on to him. I can see J is having the same trouble with Romulus.

Poor things, they need a good romp about. They’d be much happier if we freed them. Jess must think so too because once our parents are out of sight she unclips Rommy’s leash.

“Look at him go!” I laugh as I watch him dash up over the grass and onto the path leading to Lady’s Tower.

Then I let Remus loose so he can catch up with his pal, and within seconds they’ve both disappeared.

“Hey, come back!” Jess shouts. “Where’re you going?”

“Like they’re gonna answer!” I say with a snort. “Leave them, they’ll be OK.”

Jess slows her step and gazes out over the wild water. “Suppose so.”

Her cheeks are bubblegum pink, her wide eyes sparkling with pleasure as she breathes in the salty air. But, ah, those lips of hers could do with some gloss to protect them from the wind.

“Here,” I say, rummaging around in my jacket pockets and pulling out a tub of Lip Therapy. “Put some of this on.”

She stares at it then snatches it from me. “Hey, that’s mine!” Holding up the little yellow and white tin she says, “Why’ve you got it? What’s wrong with your own Vaseline?”

“Yours has SPF15 in it, mine hasn’t.”

“Like you need a sun protection factor in March. Specially on a day like this,” she shoots back.

“Well, it was nice this morning,” I say in my defence.

“Tsk!” She shoves her hands in her pockets and scowls. “You’ve got some front.”

“Why’re you making such a fuss about it? Lighten up. We always borrow each other’s things—”

“You see, that’s what I’ve been trying to tell you.” She shoves the tin to my face. “This belongs to me. Can’t I have just one thing that’s mine?”

“I don’t know what you’re on about. You borrow my Armani perfume. Geez, we always share stuff, J.”

She looks at me, holds my gaze for a moment, then slowly shakes her head. She lets out a weak laugh. “I really love you, Minty, but I’m beginning to feel suffocated. Can’t we just behave like normal sisters?”

“Sisters share stuff all the time.”

“But not like us!” She cradles her head in her hands. “I just want to be my own person, what’s wrong with that?” Then she shoves Romulus’s lead into her jacket pocket and yells, “We’re not little kids anymore. Give me a bit of space!”

She glowers at me. I glare back. In spite of the blustery wind, heat floods my face. “Fine. You can have all the space you want.” I break into a run.

Cos, know what? I’m all done with Jess and her moods.

“Drop dead, Minty,” she yells after me.

I whip round and bawl at her, the wind billowing up through my jacket. “Drop dead? Yeah, you’d like that wouldn’t you? You wouldn’t have to worry about being a twin any more. You could pretend I’d never been born.”

And with that, I stomp off to get the dogs. At least they don’t give me hassle.

“Aw, Minty, I didn’t mean to say that. Sorry,” she calls after me.

But I’ve heard her sorries before, so I keep running.

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I hear the barking before I even get there. Loud, insistent, frantic, the wind providing an eerie background music to the awful din.

“What’s going on?” Jess shouts at my heels as I take the steps leading to the old ruin two at a time.

We look at one another and I can see from the anxious look on her face that she thinks the same as me – the time for squabbling’s over. Something’s well wrong here.

“Rom? What’s all the racket?” I say, almost bowled over as he launches himself at me the instant I walk through the tall doorway.

Framed by the brown stone arch of the window behind him, Romulus’s coat is a shivering mass of golden fur. In the background, the sea batters at the rocks.

Rom’s bark has become a terrified whine. Panic rushes to my throat. “Where’s Remus?” I look around.

But, Jupiter, look at Romulus! He reminds me of a cartoon cat I once saw on telly – maybe it was in Itchy and Scratchy. I don’t know, but I remember creasing with laughter because the cat had stuck his paw into an electric socket and every hair on his body stood on end. Yeah, I laughed then but I’m not laughing now.

The blood drains from J's cheeks at the sight of our terrified dog. Romulus looks at her, leaps onto the windowsill and barks through the empty space where the glass once was. His body tenses and it's like every bit of him strains towards the shoreline. But he doesn't move off the stone ledge, just whimpers and yelps.

"Omigod! Look! Remus – he's down there," Jess says, her voice tainted with fright.

I peer through the window and see Remus, perched on the rocks at the edge of the sea.

We call out to him but he gives no sign that he's heard us.

"What'll we do?" Jess asks, biting fiercely at a nail while drumming her feet on the ground. "Omigod, look at him, he's petrified. See how near the water he is? What if he falls in?"

"He won't. We won't let him," I say, trying to squash the fear inside me. I balance myself against the window frame, lean forward and try to coax him back. But Jess's right – he *is* petrified. It's as if he's frozen there, glued to the rocks. "Remus! Here b—" My voice breaks as I struggle to keep it together.

I swirl round to ask Jess to call him but she's fumbling with her phone, hopping from foot to foot.

"Dad. Got to get Dad. He'll sort it," she says, her voice trembling as much as her fingers.

Leaving her to it, I concentrate on attracting Remus's attention.

Then, cutting through Romulus's whining, I hear her curse. "I can't get a signal," she wails. "Try yours. Quick!"

With a sinking feeling, I dig inside all my pockets. No phone. But then I knew there wouldn't be – I'd have noticed it when I was ferreting around for J's lip therapy.

“I must’ve left it in my bag!”

“Omigod, what now?”

“We need to do something!”

Do something. Do something? Yeah, yeah, of course we should. But what? There’s no way I’m going down there to fetch him. Then Remus turns his head, his melting brown eyes meet mine and I know what that something is.

So, even though the thought of going anywhere near that churning water terrifies me, I lower myself onto the window ledge, swivel my bum on the rough stone and drape my legs over the side.

“Minty, what’re you doing?” Jess bellows.

“We have to go down there. Come on.”

“Are you mad? Look at the water – it’s crashing over the rocks. It’s too dangerous!”

Omigod, I know, but what can I do? My dog needs help.

“Come back – please!”

A pitiful yowl from below causes Romulus to bark even louder. I glance over my shoulder and poor Rommy’s running about like a dog possessed. Then he stops. Barks once. Whines. Looks right at me.

Yeah, I know, boy, I have to do something. We can’t let Remus end up in the sea.

I turn back to Remus. He looks so lost and afraid. But that water...

“Minty, leave it. Let’s get Dad. He’ll know what to do.”

She’s right. I know she’s right.

Then Rom howls. Remus yelps. Lets out this terrified whimper.

That decides it.

“I have to help him,” I whisper to myself more than Jess.

And with that I drop onto the rocks.