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Opening extract from

Viva Alice!

Written by

Judi Curtin

Illustrated by

Woody Fox

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Chapter One

‘Omigod, Megan. You’ve got to come over to my place right now,’ said Alice, racing into the kitchen and grabbing my arm. ‘It’s an emergency.’

Mum looked up from the bundle of broccoli she was washing.

‘I don’t care if it’s an emergency, Megan,’ she said. ‘You’re not going anywhere until you finish your porridge.’

Mum has known my best friend for thirteen years. I guess she understands that Alice has drama queen moments. I shovelled the last few spoons of porridge into my mouth, and got up from the table.

‘Dishwasher,’ said Mum, without even looking up.

I sighed and put my bowl into the dishwasher. My cat, who was curled up in the corner of the kitchen, looked up at me mournfully.

‘Sorry, Domino,’ I said. ‘No time for cuddles. Didn’t you hear? This is an emergency.’

Domino put on her best sulky-cat face and went back to cleaning her paws as I followed Alice outside.

‘What is it?’ I asked. ‘What’s going on?’

‘It’s my mum. She’s gone crazy.’

I raised one eyebrow and Alice giggled. ‘OK, so she’s gone even crazier than usual.’

Alice’s mum and my mum are both crazy in their own, very different, ways. My mum is obsessed with saving the world, and feeding my sister Rosie and me with tons of organic fruit and vegetables. Alice’s mum is obsessed with how she looks, and spends most of her time visiting hair and nail salons.

‘What’s she done *this* time?’ I asked.

‘She’s planning a party for Jamie’s birthday.’

‘What’s crazy about that?’

‘She’s invited half the kids in his class, and ...’

‘And what?’

‘And she wants to have the party in our apartment.’

Alice’s voice was all weird when she said the last words, and I couldn’t decide if she was trying not to laugh, or trying not to cry. Maybe it was a bit of both.

‘You’ve got to be kidding,’ I said.

‘Nope. Like I said, my mum’s finally slipped over the edge. She’s officially gone crazy.’

I thought about arguing with her, but I couldn't do it. It *did* sound like Alice's mum had lost it. For most mums, having a party in your own apartment wouldn't be a big deal. Alice's mum isn't like most mums, though. Her apartment is all white and shiny and perfect. Things like a crumb on the floor or a greasy handprint on a wall are like major disasters as far as she is concerned.

When Alice was little, she was never allowed to have her parties at home – they always had to be in cinemas or restaurants or activity centres.

'But I don't understand,' I said. 'Doesn't your mum know that Jamie's friends will trash the apartment? That's going to drive her crazy.'

'I tried telling her, but she won't listen to me. Ever since I fell out of the tree and ended up in hospital, Mum's been acting really weird. She says she feels guilty about what happened, and that she should have been a better mother to Jamie and me. She says that from now on, she's going to be a "hands-on" mum. It's going to end in tears, I just know it.'

Once again, I couldn't argue. Trying to be a better person is probably a good thing, but didn't Veronica understand that it couldn't happen overnight? There's no such thing as an instant personality transplant – if there was, I'd book my mum in for one.

'OK, Alice,' I said. 'For once, I have to agree with you. I think this might well be an emergency. We'd better go over to your place and see how bad things are.'

* * *

Alice's mum, Veronica, was sitting at the kitchen table. Her hair was all messy and her usually perfect nails were all chipped and broken, like she'd been chewing them.

She was flipping madly through a pile of pages she'd printed from the computer.

'Second best won't do,' she muttered. 'This party just *has* to be perfect.'

'Do something, Megan,' whispered Alice. 'Please.'

I've always been a bit afraid of Veronica, but I knew I had to be brave.

'Er, Veronica,' I said. 'Maybe you need to rethink this whole party thing. Boys of Jamie's age can be a bit wild sometimes. Maybe it would be better if you—'

Veronica looked up at me with a scary look in her eyes. 'It's a bit too late for rethinking,' she said. 'I hand-delivered the invitations last night. No matter what happens, the party is going ahead tomorrow.'

I gulped. 'Tomorrow? Are you sure that's a good idea?'

Veronica gave a crazy laugh. 'Why ever not? Your mother always has lovely parties for you and Rosie. How hard can it be?'

Very hard?

My mum always starts planning our parties weeks in advance.

And she likes being around small kids.

And she likes cooking.

And she doesn't care if our house gets trashed.

I was wondering how to answer Veronica, when I realised it didn't matter what I said. Veronica had already forgotten about me. She'd gone back to studying her printouts, and she was adding notes to a very long list.

I knew it was time for damage limitation.

'Maybe Alice and I could help you,' I said. 'I could even ask my mum to come over for a bit. She actually likes organising parties and she's quite good at it. I know she'd be glad to—'

'No,' said Veronica in a high-pitched voice, like I'd just offered to stab her or something. 'No need to involve your mother in this. Thank you anyway, Megan, but everything is under control. Leave it to me – Jamie is going to have a party he will *never* forget.'