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Opening extract from

Mum Never Did Learn to Knock

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For my mum, with thanks for always being there

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Chapter 1

Talk

There was a hammering on the bathroom door.

"Emily, who are you talking to in there?" Dad called.

"Speak later, Mum," I whispered into my mobile phone. "Don't worry, I'm on the case. I'll find out what I can." Then I popped the phone back in its case.

I opened the bathroom door with my best innocent smile. "I'm not speaking to anyone," I told Dad. "Just cleaning my teeth."

Dad didn't look convinced. "I heard you," he insisted. "You were talking to your mother again, weren't you?"

"No."

"Well, you were talking to someone."

I waved my phone at him. "Lou. I was talking to Lou, that's all," I said. "Homework thingy. So, what's for supper?"

'Change the subject fast,' I thought, because Dad's face showed concern.

"Takeaway or takeaway?" I said. "I fancy pizza. Four cheese. OK?"

We've lived on takeaways since Mum left. I did try and cook at first, but I wasn't too good at it. All I can do is cheese on toast, and Dad can only do scrambled eggs like rubber. Yuck.



Dad put his hand on my arm. "Emily … would you … would you like to talk to someone?" he asked.

"Someone?" I echoed.

"A counsellor."

"Like who? Not Aunt Iz, puleese. She lives in wacko land."

Aunt Iz is Dad's barmy younger sister and she calls herself a new-age counsellor. All kinds of people go to her for healing-shmealing, and she consults the Tarot cards and stars for them and advises them to drink herbs that taste disgusting. So, Aunt Iz? No, ta. Mum and I used to joke that she was a witch.

"No, no, I mean a proper counsellor," Dad said. "There are people trained to help with what's happened to us."

'So now he thinks I need help,' I thought. 'Just because I've stayed in touch with Mum. I wish he'd see her or talk to her at least. She's looking great now. Loads better than before she left. Dad's the one that needs to see a counsellor. He's the one who's bottled everything up and thrown himself into his work so that he doesn't have to think about what happened.'

"No thanks, Dad," I said. "I'm fine. And I'll ... I've stopped talking to her."

'Liar, liar, pants on fire,' I thought. But what else am I to do? I'm not having people thinking I'm bonkers just because I want to talk to my mum.

Dad looked at the floor and shifted from one foot to the other. "It's not just me, Em," he said. "Miss Doolie rang from the school last night. They're worried about you there, too. She said you've been acting strangely – and it seems that you saw your mother at school."

'Well, I'm not likely to turn her away,' I thought, 'not now that she needs me.'

"Miss Doolie has fixed a time for you to see the school counsellor," Dad said. "On Monday lunchtime."

"Oh Da-ad," I moaned. "Gimme a break. I told you I've stopped talking to her, so I don't see what the problem is. Look, no way do I need to see a counsellor. That's for saddos."

Dad pressed my shoulder. "Do it for me, kid. I know these past weeks have been tough on you."