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Opening extract from

All My Secrets

Written by

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One

If I hadn't answered the doorbell that afternoon, would I ever have known the truth? Or would Dad have found a way to carry on hiding it from me? After all, if Mr Treeves had turned up just a few days earlier, I'd still have been at school enduring a long, long week of GCSE exams. But that's what my life turned on: a riddle wrapped in a coincidence, bound tightly by a lie.

And covered up with a massive secret . . .

So, the exams are all done and it's the middle of the afternoon, but I'm still in PJ bottoms and one of Mum's old sweatshirts, lolling on the sofa and thinking about making some hot chocolate. The window is open and a warm breeze is drifting through when the doorbell rings. Actually, it chimes, an annoying sound that Mum for some reason thinks is classy because it was featured on some stupid home makeover programme. She's always redecorating the living room. And their bedroom. And the twins' room. Dad puts up with it all in his solid, steady way. But he'll get totally on my case if I don't answer the door just because I feel lazy.

Even so, I wait a sec to see if he'll come. Some hope. He's in his office, at the top of the house, and he knows full well that I'm down here. The chimes sound again.

‘Evie!’ Dad yells from upstairs.

I sigh and haul myself up from the sofa. Dad and I are the only ones at home right now as Mum’s gone to pick up Jade and Jess from school. As I plod to the front door, I catch sight of myself in the hall mirror. I’ve been growing my hair for nearly a year and it’s now past my shoulders. It’s dark and shiny. Which is good. But the ends are *really* split, as Mum never tires of pointing out. ‘Like rats’ tails,’ she always says. Still, I prefer it long and uncut and it’s my hair.

I don’t even think about being in my PJs until I’m actually opening the door. Then I feel a bit self-conscious because a man is standing outside in a suit. He’s short – no taller than I am – and dapper with slicked back hair and a tightly knotted blue tie.

He stares at me for a second. ‘Evelina Brown?’ he asks. He has a soft Scottish accent.

I nod, a self-conscious knot twisting in my stomach. The man is looking at me in this weird way, like he *knows* me. Which I’m certain he doesn’t.

‘I’m Mr Treeves, solicitor with Stirling, McIntyre and Cox. Er . . . may I come in and talk to you for a minute?’ he asks.

Now he’s seriously freaking me out.

‘Talk to *me*?’ I ask.

The man nods. ‘I have important news . . . I’ve been looking for you for a while . . . that is, my firm has.’ He clears his throat. ‘Of course, perhaps if you want a . . . an adult present?’

Jeez, am I in some kind of trouble? I rack my brains, trying to think if there’s anything I could possibly have done that would mean a lawyer calling round. Nope.

‘Dad!’ I call. ‘Come here!’

There’s an awkward moment while Mr Treeves and I wait on either side of the front door, then Dad pads downstairs, barefoot in his jeans, rubbing his forehead like he always does when he’s distracted.

‘Do you need me to sign for some—?’ He stops as he catches sight of Mr Treeves. He smiles. ‘You’re not delivering a parcel, are you? How can I help?’

Mr Treeves visibly relaxes. Dad tends to make people feel comfortable like that. All my friends love him. What they don’t see is how strict he can be about going out and staying in touch and coming home at what he calls ‘a decent hour’.

‘I need to speak to your daughter, Mr . . . Mr Brown, is it?’

‘Yes, er, OK. What’s this about?’ Dad asks, looking bemused.

Mr Treeves wrinkles his nose. ‘It’s a legal matter.’ He hesitates, clearly not wanting to say more until he’s properly inside.

‘Very well.’ Dad glances at me, eyebrows raised. I shrug. I have no more idea what’s going on than he does. ‘Let’s go into the living room.’

A few seconds later, we’re all sitting down: Dad and me on the sofa, Mr Treeves perched anxiously on the edge of an armchair.

‘Please don’t be concerned; this is good news,’ Mr Treeves says, fishing some papers out of his briefcase. He looks up at me. ‘You’ve been left some money in a trust fund, Evelina.’

‘It’s Evie,’ I say automatically. ‘What’s a trust fund?’

‘A way of investing money.’ Mr Treeves hesitates. ‘In this case, a considerable amount. You inherit it when you’re sixteen at the end of August. As I say, we’ve been trying to track you down for a while now.’

I can’t take it in. I’ve been left *money*? Who on earth from? I look at Dad He’s frowning.

‘I . . . we . . . didn’t know anything about this,’ he says.

‘I realise that.’ Mr Treeves gulps. ‘Well, that’s why I’ve come in person, to explain it . . . to you both.’

‘Explain what?’ I ask. ‘Who’s left me this . . . this trust fund? And what’s “a considerable amount”?’

‘Ten million pounds.’

I gasp. Is he serious? I look at Dad again. His jaw is hanging open. He’s clearly as stunned as I am.

‘Ten million pounds?’ I echo.

At that moment the front door opens and the hall fills with Jade and Jess’s shrieks.

‘She *promised* she would let me have a go, Mum!’ Jade is whining.

‘But it’s *mine*!’ Jess, as usual, sounds utterly outraged.

‘Girls, *please*.’ Mum sounds weary.

A second later, my eight-year-old twin sisters, Jade and Jess, have barrelled their way into the living room. They’re brought up short as they spot Mr Treeves, then dart away, out of sight. Mum puts her head around the door as they push past her.

‘Oh, hello.’ She glances at Dad, clearly expecting him to

perform an introduction. But Dad is still sitting stock-still, mouth gaping.

'I'm sorry, I've brought some rather surprising news for Evelina,' Mr Treeves says, standing up.

'Evie?' Mum turns to me, her eyes all curiosity.

It's the last moment that I trust her. Or Dad.

I stand up beside Mr Treeves. 'Somebody's left me ten million pounds in a . . . a trust fund or something.' I turn to Mr Treeves, ignoring the widening of Mum's eyes. 'Who is it?'

Mr Treeves clears his throat.

'You've been left the money by an Irina Galloway.'

Across the room, Mum slaps her hand over her mouth. Dad lets out a low moan.

I turn to Mr Treeves. 'Who on earth is Irina Galloway?'

'No!' Dad jumps up. 'Stop!'

'Please.' Mum's normally rosy cheeks are as pale as paper. 'Please don't say any more.'