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Opening extract from

Dara Palmer's Major Drama

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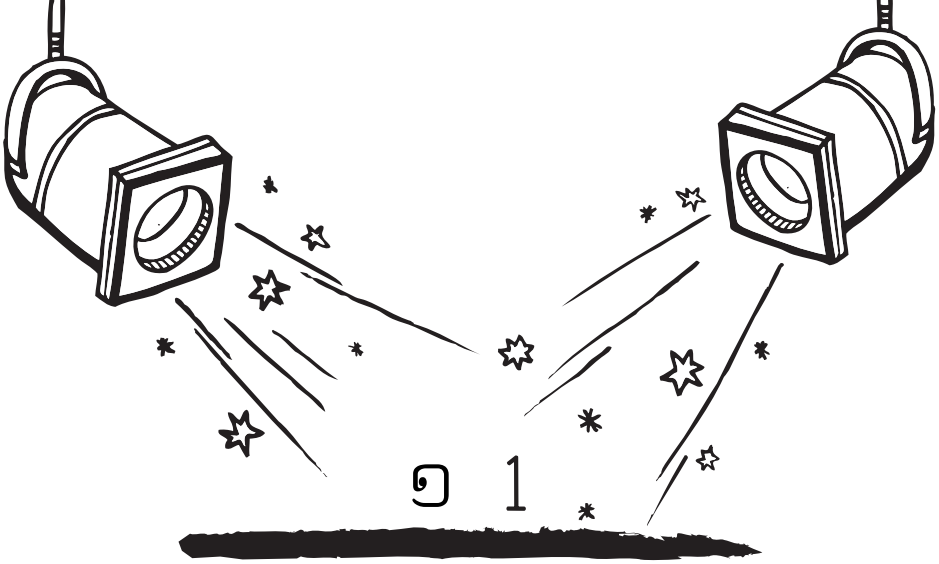
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1

I never thought I'd say this, but nuns and noodles can change your life. Well, maybe they don't change everyone's, but they definitely changed mine. And not just once, either, which is so freaky I don't even know how to measure it with a spoon.

No one thinks nuns are going to be life-changing. Sorry, but that's the truth. Especially not the kind of nuns who sing in trees and make clothes out of curtains like Maria in *The Sound of Music*, which is a musical extravaganza about not-your-usual-type-of-nun and whistling captains and singing children and double-crossing Nazi boyfriends and female deer and lonely goatherds high on a hill singing 'layohlayohlay-eeh-oh'. Which sounds nuts, I know, but it kind of makes sense when you see the movie. Kind of. It's



still pretty nuts, though, even then.

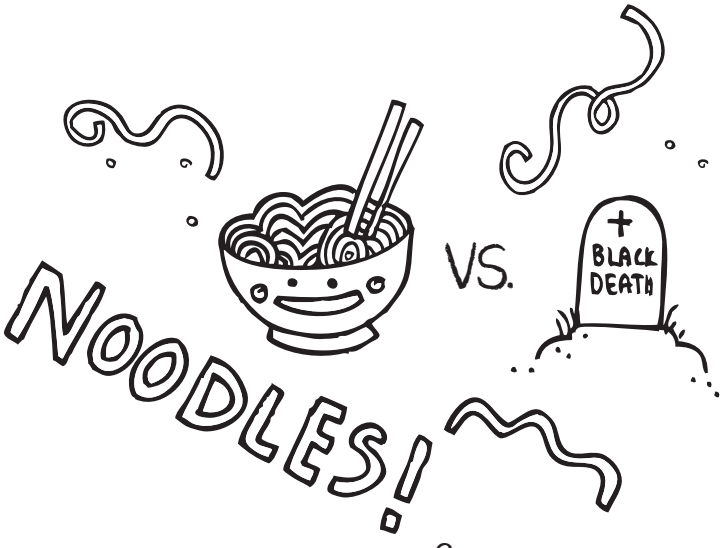
And I don't even like noodles. But if something's going to change your life, I guess noodles are better than the Black Death, a monster earthquake, a plague of poisonous frogs or a million other terrible things.

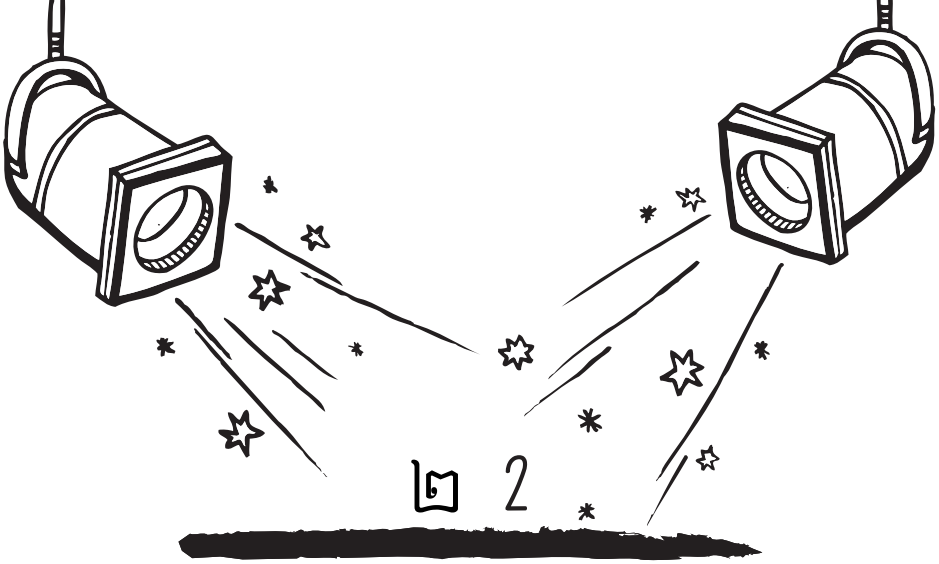
This all happened a while ago now. Let me just say, I was a different person back then. I don't know if you're going to like the old me much when you hear what I was like, but I've changed. Stuff happened along the way – all kinds of stuff, actually. Nuns and noodles were just the beginning.



So maybe we should start there. At the very beginning.

It's a very good place to start.





2

It was a Wednesday morning in March, which is normally not even remotely exciting, but this one was special. We had less than two weeks left of school before we broke up, which meant our music and drama teacher, Miss Snarling, was going to hold auditions for the end-of-year play any day now. She always held them at the end of the spring term so everyone knew their parts before we broke up for Easter.

Lacey and I were mega-hyped about the play. That morning, we went in to school bursting like exploding watermelons because the auditions had to be in the next few days. You have to understand, Lacey and I were desperate to star in it. And I mean STAR. As in lead role. As in big deal. As in loads of lines and even



more attention. As in bouquets of flowers and standing ovations. As in give-me-that-part-or-I-will-die-right-here-on-the-floor.

We'd never had lead roles before. We'd never had any decent parts at all, for some mysterious reason, but this year it was different. We were in Year 6 now, and Year 6 always got the biggest parts because they were leaving for high school. This year, our lives were going to change upside-down-edly and it was all going to start with the end-of-year play.

We got told off for chatting, for fidgeting and then for not listening, and that was only in the first ten minutes of class. Even after Mr Foxx sent us to sit on the quiet table for ten minutes, we were still like wind-up toys when you've just wound them up. I sat there dreaming of driving around Hollywood in my red convertible car with everyone taking photos of me. I don't know what Lacey was dreaming of, but you could bet your bottom on your dollar that her dreams were just like mine.

Lacey-Lou Davis loved drama as much as I did, which was why she was my best friend for ever and ever (BFFEAE). We were both going to be actors when we

grew up. We were going to leave dry boring England and move to America, where all the houses are mansions, all the taxis are yellow and everyone's rich and beautiful. Lacey was moving to LA and I was moving to Hollywood. We were going to be global megastars but stay BFFEAE and eat lunch together in posh restaurants. We had it all planned.

I was great at acting. Even Lacey said so, and Lacey knew everything about acting. She'd have told you right away if you were rubbish. She told the others in our class all the time, which didn't make her massively popular. In fact, my other friends hassled me for hanging out with her, but what could I do? She was my BFFEAE. We were going places.

When Mr Foxx called us back to our usual tables, our heads were full of *buzzbuzziness*. We couldn't focus on our schoolwork even if we wanted to, and we really didn't want to because, let's face it, school in real life is sleeve-chewingly boring. School in the movies is way more fun. No one ever does any work, they just hang around the lockers talking to boys with flicky hair, bicker with nasty rich girls and then jump in their cars and drive



to the mall.

I love movies. I think about them every hour of every day and I act out movies in my head, like, all the time. I especially love Bradley Porter (best actor ever) and Liberty Lee (best actress ever. Actually, you're supposed to call everyone an actor now, even women, which I know about because show business is my life). I watch everything they're in over and over again, even though half the time I have no idea what they're talking about. There's this whole language I don't understand, with words like proms and pageants and homecoming and vanity cases and tenth grade and thanksgiving. I'm, like, Huh? What are all those things?

Even though I was good at acting, I still practised so I could get as good as Liberty Lee. Every night I made faces in front of the mirror, like being surprised and sad and delighted. My best face was the one where someone says a stinging comment and you look to the side and think long and hard about it (which you have to do in soap operas).

Lacey even agreed that that was my best face. Her best face is shock. She's so good at it! I just know she'll get parts in movies where she's, like, in the sea all relaxed and she





looks up and there's a massive tidal wave coming (close-up of her face) and she freaks out, turns around to swim away and sees a gigantic shark right in front of her with its jaws open. There are loads of movies like that. She's going to be SO famous.

I could do surprised faces but they weren't as good as Lacey's. I could cry better than Lacey, though – I'd been working on it. My secret was that I imagined an earthquake ripping up our road, making our house collapse, and my parents and my brother Felix got trapped in the rubble. They didn't die or anything; I'm not that mean. But the panic of not knowing whether they were alive or dead made me cry in zero seconds flat.

I wasn't proud to admit my technique, but it really worked. The tears welled up and came rolling out of my eyes. I'm sure that's how Liberty Lee does it as well.

After the first lesson, Mr Foxx announced that the seniors had to go into the hall for an assembly. Lacey and I squealed at each other with outstretched eyes and flapped our hands in excite-a-panic.

This was it!

We scurried in and sat on the floor with our legs



crossed, jiggling our knees. Miss Snarling stood up, holding a hefty pile of paper. She was wearing a yellow cardigan, black trousers and yellow shoes so she looked a bit like a giant wasp. Her name suited her down to the ground – Lacey reckoned her first name was 'Always'. She was the meanest music and drama teacher ever and she always chose the most boring old-fashioned plays no one even liked. Last year she picked *Little Shop of Horrors* and we were like . . . huh? Little what of what?

'Good morning, everyone,' she said. She was tall and wide with a gap in her teeth and a bush of curly hair like Medusa snakes, and she always wore at least one thing that was yellow. I'm sorry but nobody wears yellow. Maybe they do in India or the Caribbean or places where it's hot and happy, but not in London. It's just . . . wrong.

'I'm happy to announce that we will be holding auditions today for the end-of-year play, which will be . . .'

Lacey yelped. I held my breath. *Who Stole My Brain?*, I thought. *Please say Who Stole My Brain?*

'*The Sound of Music!*'

Huh? Lacey and I looked at each other in horror.

The what?

