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Opening extract from

I Knew You Were Trouble
A Jessie Jefferson Novel

Written by

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Prologue

'Stop looking so worried.'

'It's just… I don't know, Jessie, you've got a bodyguard for a reason.'

I scowl out of the window at the scenery flashing past. 'Yeah, and it's ridiculous,' I mutter under my breath.

Four months ago, I didn't even know that I *had* a dad, let alone that he's a famous rock star. It was all fun and games in the beginning when my identity was still a secret, but now it's out there that I'm Johnny Jefferson's daughter and everything's gone one stop too far on the crazy train.

He doesn't say anything and, when I look back at him, his jaw is rigid with tension. My eyes travel along the length of his long, lean arms until they rest on his tanned hands gripping the steering wheel. I'm suddenly tempted to unclick my seatbelt and climb closer so I can press my lips to his warm neck, but I know that would be pushing my luck. He's come over all protective these days.

He glances in the rear-view mirror and his frown deepens.

'What is it?' I ask, my thoughts still on kissing him.

'I don't know,' he murmurs. 'That white van has been behind us for a while.'

I swivel in my seat and look through the back window, but I can't make out anyone in the driver's seat. 'You're being paranoid,' I say, brushing him off, and then he's swerving off the main road into a smaller one.

'Whoa!' I gasp, trying to stay upright. The van flies straight past us on the main road. 'See?' I exclaim. 'Nothing to worry about. Jeez! Pull over.'

He doesn't bother indicating as he crunches to a stop at the entrance to a private driveway. I flash him a dark look and wrench open the door, hopping out onto the gravel.

'Oi,' he calls. 'Where do you think you're going?'

'I need some air,' I state, slamming the door shut.

A moment later he joins me. I glare up at him.

'Come on, maybe we should go to your dad's place,' he says gently.

I stare at him, incredulous. I can't believe he's saying that to me. 'No!' I raise my voice. 'I'm sick of feeling like a prisoner! I just want some alone time with my boyfriend – is that too much to ask?'

'Hey,' he says softly, sliding his arms round my waist and pulling me against his firm chest. To my surprise, I discover I'm fighting back tears.

It's all been too much. I want my anonymity back. I'm fed up of getting harassed by the press and being followed around by a bodyguard every minute of every damn day. I'm sick of it all. I just want to be left alone. So today I made a run for it. I'm free! And now he's telling me to go back? No bloody way.

'Kiss me,' I demand, tilting my face up to him.

He touches his lips to mine, but withdraws all too quickly. 'We're parked in somebody's driveway,' he says uncertainly.

I start to laugh, but the sound is verging on manic, the laugh of a crazy person that's been locked up for too long.

I take a few steps backwards, away from him. He snatches my hand and pulls me towards him and this time he kisses me like he means it. The sun, surprisingly warm for October, beats down on our heads as his hands circle my waist and then he pushes me back against the car door and traps me with his body. We kiss like it's our last, and it is so, so sweet. I draw a sharp breath as he wrenches his lips away from mine and stares past me, over the car roof. His whole body tenses.

'The van,' he says in a low, urgent voice.

Before I can roll my eyes, I hear it, like thunder, hurtling towards us. And then it screeches to a stop and my heart stops with it because I *know* we're in danger.

'RUN!' I scream, shoving him away from me. 'RUN!'

Six weeks earlier

Chapter 1

I stare contemplatively at the girl in the mirror. She looks the same as her reflection of a couple of months ago. She has the same light-blonde hair, tied back into an untidy braid, the same green eyes, outlined with black mascara, and the same school uniform cut daringly high. But she's not the same girl. She is anything but.

Before the summer holidays, that girl there was Jessie Pickerill: an orphan of six months. But *I'm* Jessie Jefferson, daughter of a global megastar. The only thing is, hardly anybody knows it.

My ears prick up at the sound of my rock-star dad's name being mentioned on the radio.

'*Johnny Jefferson's world tour sold out in minutes on Friday. Which lucky people among you managed to get tickets?*'

I smile to myself. *I'll have ringside seats!* Of course, the tour isn't until next year – ages away – so I'll have to put it out of my mind for now. But the thought of hanging out backstage with

Barney and Phoenix, my two little half-brothers, makes me want to spontaneously combust on the spot.

'Are you nearly ready?' Stu, my stepdad, calls up the stairs.

'Coming!' I call back, my stomach instantly swamped with nerves.

If Mum were here, she'd hug me tightly and then crack some joke to make me laugh. But she's not here, and I don't want to cry today, so I try to put her out of my mind.

It's my first day of school in Year Eleven, but I'm unusually apprehensive. My friend Natalie has moved on to sixth-form college, and my ex-best friend Libby is now living in her new bestie Amanda's pockets. I have no idea where I stand with Tom, the boy I had a crush on before the summer holidays. We were meant to go on a date, but I haven't been in touch with him since I got home from America. I've been so busy and, I don't know, maybe I've missed that particular train. I guess I'll find out soon enough.

For a moment, Jack's blue-grey eyes stare back at me from inside my mind and the image is so tangible, I want to reach out and push his black hair away from his face.

I'm still certain he'd break my heart if I gave him the chance. But God, I fancied him. Unfortunately I still do.

'We're going to be late!' Stu calls.

'I'm coming!' I shout back again, grabbing my bag and pushing all thoughts of LA bad-boy rock-stars-in-the-making out of my mind.

Just one more year to get through, I remind myself as I jog down the stairs, and then I'm free to do what I want. Free to move to America if I want to. Free to tell the world that *I'm* Johnny's long-lost, fifteen-year-old daughter.

No one would believe it if they could see me now.

I pull the front door shut and climb into Stu's little white Fiat, looking back at our shabby 1970s townhouse.

As disguises go, mine rocks, I think with a smirk.

Everything may feel different, but it all looks weirdly the same.

'Have a good day,' Stu says, raising one eyebrow at me from behind his black, horn-rimmed glasses as he wanders off to the staffroom.

'You too,' I call after him, hesitating uncertainly in the corridor as he disappears out of sight. On impulse, I decide to go to the bathroom, where I play Candy Crush on my phone until I hear the nearby courtyard start to fill with people. I wish Stu didn't have to come into school so early. He's a Maths teacher here, so he doesn't really have a choice. Libby would sometimes get in early to hang out with me, but those days are well and truly gone.

I sigh and switch off my phone, stuffing it into my bag as I hear someone enter the cubicle next to mine. I flush the loo and go to wash my hands, jolting when I see Amanda leaning up against the wall.

'Oh! Hello!' I say.

'Hi, Jessie,' she replies, her voice lacking the warmth she reserves for my former best friend. A split second later she switches her attention to the locked cubicle. 'Get a move on, Libs!' she calls good-naturedly. 'We're going to miss out on our table.'

An uneasy feeling rolls over me. Of *course* they'll be sitting together this year. I wash my hands quickly and leave the bathroom just as I hear Libby ask, 'Was that Jessie?'

*

The morning drags by. I end up sitting next to Louise, the new girl, in Science. Libby and Amanda sit at a table behind us. Libby gave me a little wave and mouthed, 'You OK?' as Amanda hurried her past me, but I don't know how she expected me to reply. It's not like I can talk to her about Johnny in front of everyone. She knows about him – she's been sworn to secrecy – but we haven't caught up properly since I've been home. I've spent most of my spare time with the Jeffersons. We all had to rush back to the UK together because Johnny's dad had a heart attack – luckily he's going to be fine. I got to meet him last week and he seems a real character. I'd like to get to know him better.

On top of that, shortly after I returned from LA, my grandmother passed away. I barely knew her – she hadn't been close to my mum or me, and she'd been in a home for years, suffering from senile dementia. But I was her last living relative, and she was my last blood connection to Mum, so I found it understandably difficult to organise everything and then attend her funeral. Stu helped and came with me, thankfully.

Anyway, with everything that's been going on, I haven't had a chance to see much of anyone.

After English, I spend break in the library on my own, before finding myself beside Louise again for History and Maths.

When the lunch bell rings, Amanda makes a big show of gathering all her stuff together and talking overexcitedly to Libby about going to eat their lunch on the playing field. I take my time and, after a moment, I become aware that Louise is doing the same. If I felt apprehensive about school today, I can't imagine how she must feel.

'Want to come to the cafeteria with me?' I ask her impulsively.

'Sure,' she replies, a little too quickly.

We follow Amanda and Libby out. Amanda has hooked her arm through Libby's and is whispering something conspiratorial into her ear. Her OTT behaviour makes me want to gag. *Libby is lapping it up*, I think meanly. Suddenly Libby looks over her shoulder at me and smiles.

'You coming to eat on the field?' she asks, pulling Amanda to a stop.

'We're going to the cafeteria.' I indicate Louise.

She nods. 'See you later maybe?'

'Not if I see you first,' I joke, but don't quite pull off my attempt at humour. Libby smiles at me awkwardly as Amanda steers her downstairs.

Disheartened, I traipse after her, turning to the new girl as we walk. 'Where have you moved from?'

'Portsmouth,' Louise replies, looking awkward.

She's about my height and has bleached blonde hair with dark roots cut into a choppy, short style. There's a tiny hole in the side of her nose that I'm guessing is from a piercing she's removed for school. I like her look.

'My dad got a job here,' she elaborates with a shrug. 'He's a doctor.'

'Cool.' She's just answered my next question. I try to come up with something else to ask her. 'Bit rubbish having to start a new school in your last year of GCSEs,' I say, as we reach the bottom of the stairs.

'It sure is,' she replies flatly.

Now I'm lost for words.

The smell from the cafeteria engulfs us before we reach it and we go to stand in the queue.

It's then that I see him: Tom Ryder, a few metres ahead of me. He's in sixth form now and looks even better out of school uniform. He's wearing denim jeans and grey Converse trainers with a faded yellow T-shirt, and his brown hair is streaked with highlights from the summer sun. As he turns to say something to his mate, Chris, I see his profile: straight nose, long eyelashes, bronzed skin…

I jolt when I realise that Louise is talking to me.

'Sorry, what?'

'Who's that?' she asks me, her lips curling upwards at the corners.

'Who?'

'Him.' She nods at Tom.

'Oh.' I shrug. 'Just, you know, Tom Ryder.'

She smirks at me knowingly.

I frown at her. 'Is that what you asked me?' I'm sure that wasn't the question she came out with when I was busy swooning.

'No, I was wondering if the food here is any good, but this subject is far more interesting.'

I blush and, to my mortification, Tom chooses that exact same moment to catch my eye.

'Hey,' he says.

'Hi,' I mumble, looking down as the burning sensation on my face intensifies. When I look up again, he's being served.

A few moments later he passes by with his lunch, but he doesn't say anything, just raises his eyebrows at me and gives me a small, uncomfortable smile. He's walking too quickly for me to strike up a belated conversation and my embarrassment transforms into disappointment. That wasn't at all how I expected our first meeting after the summer holidays to go.

A few minutes later I'm sitting at a table with Louise, deep in thought.

'Want to talk about it?' she asks, dunking a potato wedge into some ketchup and popping it into her mouth. 'You can trust me,' she adds. 'It's not like I'm going to tell anyone. You're the only person who's said more than two words—'

'I wish I had more to say,' I cut in, as an image of Amanda and Libby with their arms linked comes to mind. I could do with someone to confide in. 'Basically, we were supposed to go to the cinema during the holidays, but I went away and haven't had time to text him since I've been back.'

'You haven't had time to *text*?'

'I've been really busy.' I shrug defensively, not wanting to go into details.

'Wow,' she says, deadpan.

'It's not like he's texted me, either.'

And, from the look on his face as he walked past earlier, I doubt he ever will. I can tell by Louise's expression that she's thinking the same thing.

'Hey, chick.' Johnny's warm voice spills down the line early that evening. I still can't get used to calling him Dad. 'How was your first day back?'

'It was OK,' I reply non-committally.

'That good?'

'It was fine. What have you been up to?' I ask, changing the subject.

'Meg's been catching up with a friend of hers today, so I've had the boys to myself. We went to the park. Fed the ducks.'

Meg is Johnny's wife. When we first met, she and I had a few

issues, but she seems to be over her initial mistrust of me now. I hope so. I really want us to get on.

'Sounds nice,' I say, wishing I could have gone with them.

'It wasn't that nice. Barney slipped over in the mud and nearly fell into the river. Sam almost had a heart attack.' He chuckles.

Sam – Samuel – is one of Johnny's bodyguards from America, and came with the family on this trip to the UK. Barney, age four, is older brother to Phoenix, who recently turned one. They're so, so cute.

'I can just imagine,' I say, my voice still tinged with sadness.

'You alright?' Johnny asks with concern. 'You seem down.'

'Oh, you know, first day back and all. I miss you guys.'

'You'll see us this weekend,' he reminds me.

As if I could forget. I'm going to stay at their massive mansion in Henley. I can't wait.

'So what have you got planned for the rest of the week? School, school and more school?'

'I've got a birthday party on Friday night,' I tell him.

'Whose?'

'A friend of a friend,' I reply.

'Which friend?'

'Natalie. Her friend's name is Liam.'

'How old is he?'

'He's just turned eighteen.' Jeez, what's with all the questions?

'Isn't that crowd a little old for you to be hanging out with?' he asks.

'Are you taking the piss?!' Rock star or not, dads can be *preeettty* irritating.

'Just behave yourself,' he adds.

OK, that's one step too far. This is coming from a former womanising drink and drug addict! 'As if *you* can tell *me* to behave!'

'That's exactly why I *can* tell you,' he says coolly. 'I've been there, done that. I know where it gets you.'

'I get enough of this shit from Stu,' I complain.

'That's why I like your stepdad,' Johnny says cheerfully. 'Oh, and watch your mouth,' he snaps as an afterthought.

Stu was initially a little stand-offish with Johnny – I'm not sure he's quite forgiven him for the way he treated my mum.

I'm not sure *I've* quite forgiven him, I think with a pang. Mum died eight months ago, at the beginning of this year, and her death is still so raw. I'm getting better at not thinking about it every minute of every day, but sometimes it still hits me out of the blue.

She was killed in a freak accident on my fifteenth birthday. She'd been rushing around, trying to get everything ready for my party, and she'd finally hurried out of the house to buy my birthday cake. I waited and waited for her to return, getting increasingly pissed off with how long she was taking. Eventually that annoyance turned to dread.

All of my fears were founded. The police turned up to say that she had been walking along the pavement when a loose fourth-storey windowpane had crashed down on her, killing her instantly. I broke, then, and I'll never be fixed.

Mum had kept the secret of my real father's identity from me my whole life. A few months after her death, I began to resent the fact that I would never know the truth. Poor Stu didn't know what to do with me – I was being a total bitch. I had no idea that he knew who my biological father was and,

when he finally made the decision to come clean, I didn't believe him.

I still remember the exact moment that I found out.

'*Please tell me*,' I'd begged him. '*I need to know. It's why I've been so…* angry*… I can't move on, I can't say goodbye to her. Not really. I'm so hurt and upset that she kept this from me.* Please…'

In the end, he came right out with it: '*His name is Johnny Jefferson.*'

That wasn't the moment, by the way. Like I said, I didn't believe him at first because Johnny is a household name, like über-successful. As if *he* could be my father!

But Stu explained that Mum was a groupie of Johnny's first band, Fence, before they became megastars. He said that she followed the band everywhere and was completely obsessed with Johnny, their lead singer. This seemed more plausible because Mum was such a rock chick.

I warned Stu that if he was lying to me I'd walk out of the door and he'd never see me again. Then – and *this* is the moment – he swore on my mother's grave that he was telling the truth.

I believed him, then. He wouldn't lie about that. I felt dizzy with shock, like my world had broken away from its axis and started to roll downhill.

That was just over two months ago, and my world is still out of control.

When I went to LA for the summer, Johnny himself told me what had happened between him and my mother, and it wasn't pretty. He said they hooked up after one of his concerts and had a bit of a thing going for a while, but, when Mum started to want commitment, he pushed her

away. He even scored with another girl right in front of her. Bastard.

She never told him about me. By the time she found out she was pregnant, he was off on a world tour and stories about him and his groupies kept hitting the headlines. She realised she was just one of many. It broke her heart, and Stu was around to pick up the pieces.

So no, I don't think my stepdad has fully forgiven Johnny for his behaviour in the past, even if my dad is a changed man now, thanks to Meg and the boys.

The sound of a wailing child pierces my ears, bringing me back to the present.

'*You OK, buddy?*' Johnny shouts to his son over the cries.

'You gotta go?' I interrupt.

'Yep, sorry, Jess. Barney's banged his head on the table.'

'Ouch. Give him a hug from his big sister.' *Half*-sister, but no need to be technical about it.

'I will. Take care,' he says warmly. 'And be careful at the party!'

'Yeah, yeah,' I reply, but he's already gone.

By the time Friday rolls around, I've taken to calling Louise 'Lou', I've filled her in on the history between Libby and me, and she even knows that my mum died earlier this year, although I didn't give her many details. She's alright, actually. I like her. And it's a relief to have a new friend to take away the sting of Libby and Amanda's twosome.

'Any plans for tonight?' Lou asks when we're sitting on the field at lunchtime.

'House party,' I reply, distracted by Tom and his mates playing

football. I didn't see him at all yesterday. It was raining so we spent our breaks in the cafeteria. He was probably in the sixth-form chill-out area. The *inner sanctum*…

'It's at Natalie's friend's house,' I elaborate. I've told Lou about Natalie, too. 'What about you?'

'Nothing. Well, I said I'd call Chloe after dinner.'

Chloe is Lou's best mate from Portsmouth. I'm not the only one who's pining for a friend. The difference is, Lou's circumstances were thrust upon her. I can only blame myself for the end of my friendship with Libby. I was hurting so much after Mum's death that I wanted to dull the pain, not add to it by talking it through all the time. And Libby's family is so perfect that being around them just reminded me of what I'd lost. I take a deep breath, trying not to dwell on Mum. I don't want to lose it at school.

'Why don't you come to the party, too?' I suggest.

'Thanks, but I don't want to gatecrash.'

'Nat won't care.' At least I don't think she will.

'OK, maybe,' she says.

I jolt as I see Tom glance our way, then someone kicks the ball at him and he's off again.

'Is he going?' Lou asks me, noticing who has my attention.

'I don't know.' I drag my eyes away to see Libby coming our way with Amanda in tow.

'Can we join you?' Libby asks, with a wavering smile.

'Of course,' I reply, pleased, ignoring the sour look on Amanda's face as she reluctantly follows suit and sits down next to Libby on the grass.

'How's your first week been?' Libby smiles at Lou.

'Not bad,' Lou replies.

I listen to their polite chat, trying to figure out why Libby is bothering. It's clear she's Amanda's now. In fact, she's so deep in her new friend's pockets that I'm surprised Amanda hasn't stamped MINE, MINE, MINE all over her.

Maybe she's missing me, a small voice inside me whispers. My instinct is to quash it, but I'm not sure that I want to.

I look towards the playing field again and, at that very moment, Tom locks eyes with me. A shiver goes down my spine as he smiles. I shyly return the gesture, then make a concerted effort to join in the conversation around me, but I still feel nervy for ages afterwards.

After final bell has rung, Lou and I walk out of the classroom together.

'So do you want to come tonight or what?' I ask her, slinging my backpack over my shoulder as we burst out of the double doors into the afternoon sunshine.

'Thanks, but I think I'll give it a miss.'

'You sure?' We walk across the cobbled courtyard.

'Yes, but thanks. Next time?'

'OK.'

At least I offered.

Up ahead, I see Tom exit the sixth-form block alone, pausing for a moment to wait for someone.

'Why don't you go and talk to him?' Lou suggests, as my footsteps falter.

'No, I couldn't.'

'Why not?'

'Things are too weird.' I shake my head decisively and glance up at Stu's corner office.

'He's looking at you!' Lou whispers urgently, making me do exactly what you're not supposed to do in this situation: shoot my head round and meet his stare straight on. Oops. It's now completely obvious that he's the subject of our discussion. Before I can look away again, he grins.

Lou giggles, I shush her and then his mate Chris walks out of the door behind him. Tom nods in our direction and they amble over to us.

'Alright?' I say casually, praying my face doesn't imitate a beetroot this time.

'Alright,' Tom replies. 'Hey.' He nods at Lou, and I introduce them.

'Are you going to Liam's eighteenth tonight?' I ask.

Tom frowns. 'Who's Liam?'

Disappointment surges through me. I'll take that as a no, then. 'He goes to college with Natalie,' I explain.

'You know Liam,' Chris chips in, elbowing Tom. 'He's Isla's sister's… What's her name?'

'Lauren,' Tom offers.

'Yeah, Lauren's ex.'

I stopped trying to follow the connection at the mention of Isla – Tom's ex-girlfriend. And I switched off when Tom implied he wasn't going…

'Oh,' Tom says slowly. 'Yeah, I know the guy. Is it at his house?' he asks me.

'I think so. I think anyone's invited,' I add lamely, hoping that's actually the case.

'You going?' Chris asks Lou.

'Maybe.' She shifts on her feet and, to my surprise, blushes. Does she like Chris?!

'Might see you there, then,' Tom says, bringing my attention back to him. I suddenly perk up again.

'Sure.' I nod casually and indicate for Lou to join me as we walk away. 'So are you coming after all?' I whisper.

'Maybe,' she replies, her colour deepening. 'I'll ask my dad.'