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Opening extract from

The Person Controller

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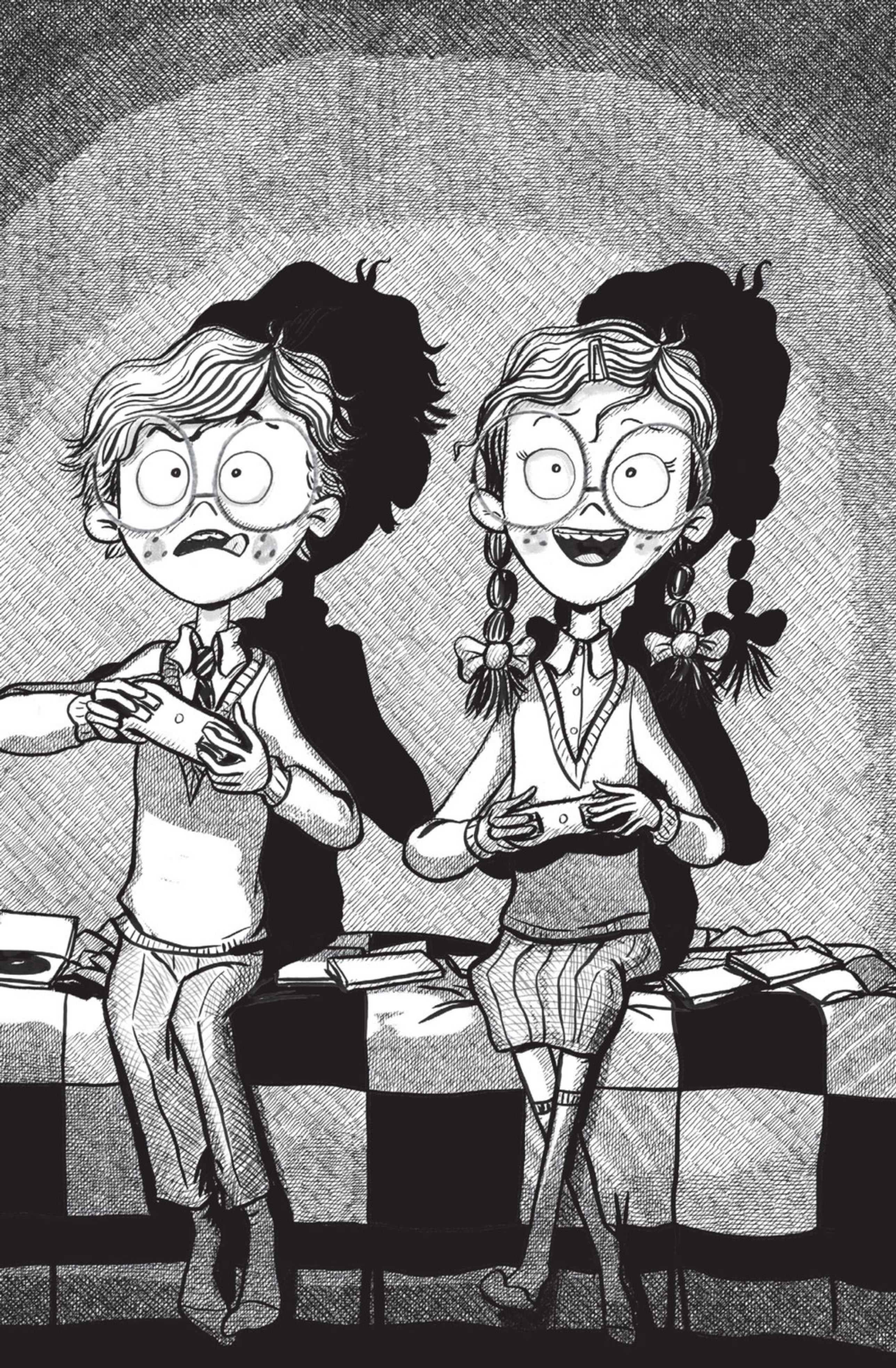
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I ♡ T.V.

CHAPTER 1

Fred and Ellie

Fred and Ellie Stone were twins. But they were never sure whether or not they could call themselves identical. They certainly shared exactly the same birthday (20th September, eleven years ago) and they had the same mum and dad (Eric and Janine). But their names were Fred and Ellie. And a boy and a girl are, clearly, not identical.[1]

Yet they *felt* identical. They sometimes even felt

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[1] A boy and girl can only be fraternal twins, never identical. But don't ask me to explain the difference. It's a bit yucky.

that they knew what one another were thinking. And, even if they were 200 metres apart, they could mouth words at each other and always know what the other one was saying. They did look pretty identical too. They both wore glasses and, most of the time, their school uniforms (even though uniform wasn't compulsory at their school). And they both, at the point at which this story begins, had braces on their top teeth.



They also both *liked* the same things. These included: superheroes; Japanese fantasy animation films; comics; maths (yes, they actually *liked* maths –



sometimes they played a game called 'Who Can Name More Decimal Places of Pi?'); and, most importantly, video games. *All* video games, but their favourites were *FIFA*, *Street Fighter*, *Super Mario* and *Minecraft*. The one thing they would save up their not-very-much pocket money to buy was the most up-to-date versions of these games. Ellie, though, was better than Fred at video games.[2] Which Fred didn't mind. He knew she had quicker fingers and better hand-to-eye coordination.

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[2] Fred was better than her at one thing, however: customising the avatars. He could customise any avatar on any game so the character on screen looked great – hairstyle, eye colour, skin colour, clothes, teeth, every shape and size. Fred sometimes wondered if he didn't like doing that even more than playing the games.

And, even though he sometimes got frustrated at losing, other times he just liked watching her fingers speed across her controller, as if she was playing a classical concerto by heart. And, when I say her controller, I mean *her* controller. Ellie and Fred always used their own ones. Ellie in particular was always very definite about which one was hers. The feel and the weight of her controller – even if, to the untrained eye/hand, both of them may have looked/felt exactly the same – suited her style perfectly.

Which was why what happened to it was quite so upsetting.

CHAPTER 2

Eric

Eric Stone was – there is no nice way of saying this – fat. Well, there *are* nice ways of saying it – and Eric did often use these ways, describing himself as *big-boned*, or *portly*, or suffering from *terrible water retention* – but the truth was he was fat. Because he ate too much. He didn't have terrible water retention; he had terrible bacon-sandwich retention.

To be fair to Eric, he did – normally after a bit of prompting from his wife, Janine, and his children,

Fred and Ellie – go on a lot of diets.

He'd been on the High Fibre diet, and the Low Carb diet, and the Juice diet, and the No Juice diet, and the Cabbage Soup diet, and the Pea and Mint Soup diet, and a diet he made up where he only ate banana muffins and cheese. He'd been on the 5:2 diet and the 6:1 diet and the 4:3 diet and the 2:5 diet and even the 17:28 diet (which meant not



eating anything for a minute between 17:27 and 17:29 every day). He'd been to Weight Watchers and Chocaholics Anonymous and Sixteen-stoners' Self-help and Big-boned Portly Bacon Sandwich Retentors Sit Around in a Circle and Say How it isn't Really Their Fault (actually this last one was what Janine called *all* Eric's diet groups).

Trouble was, the diets didn't make Eric any lighter. If anything, they made him heavier because every time he finished one – and he did *always* finish them, normally after only four or five days – he would eat about five times his own weight in bacon sandwiches.[3]

Eric was just tucking into a bacon sandwich – the first one he'd had after giving up on the Jacket Potato Skin diet, which he'd followed for two whole

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[3] It didn't help that Eric worked for a supermarket as a retail manager, whatever that is (I should know, I know, but I don't – I've never known what jobs called things like that actually involve). This meant the Stones got large discounts on all their food, especially bacon, and Eric brought home so much of it that he got a discount on his discount.

days (it allowed you to eat jacket potato skins and you could put low-fat spread on them, which Eric had decided included mayonnaise) – when *it*, the thing that happened to Ellie's controller which was so upsetting, happened.[4]

The bacon sandwich, in a way, was what caused the whole thing. Because, whenever Eric Stone had his first bacon sandwich after a diet, he would become so entranced by the fatty saltiness of the pork rashers and how deliciously it sat against the brown-sauce-smeared white bread that he would forget everything else and close his eyes. He would lose himself in that bacon sandwich.

Unfortunately, the point at which he was losing himself in this *particular* bacon sandwich was also the point at which he was sitting down, on the sofa, in front of the TV, plate in one hand, sandwich in the other, IN HIS PANTS.

His big, grey, bought-in-1987 Y-front PANTS.

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[4] I'm aware that there are two uses of the word 'happened' very close together here. Don't let it worry you.