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Opening extract from
All About the Hype

Written by
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Chapter 1

I lie on the sofa in front of the television with my head on her lap. Her fingers are cool as they brush across my temple and trail down the length of my light-blond hair, getting caught up in a knot. She abandons her soothing stroking and fixates on unpicking the knot instead.

'Ow, that hurts!' I complain.

'Your hair is not getting the better of me, Jessie Pickerill,' she warns, and I know that she won't be defeated until I'm tangle free.

So I endure the pain because I love her and I know that she loves me.

That's right, I remember. Her hands were always cold.

I squeeze my eyes shut and sob quietly, muffling the sound with my pillow.

Today is my sixteenth birthday and I woke up with the sickest feeling in the pit of my stomach. For the last hour, I've been racking my brain for the tiniest details, the seemingly unimportant ones, the ones that I'm most likely to forget.

But I *don't want* to forget her burning our dinner because she was distracted playing air guitar to Starship on the radio. I can't bear to lose the memory of her jumping on my bed and throwing shapes to my music while I resignedly got ready for school. I'm even clinging to the vision of her discarding another outfit on her bedroom floor and mischievously turning her attention to my wardrobe.

She always woke me up gently, quietly calling my name and stroking my arm.

Unless it was my birthday and then she'd bound into my room, shouting 'WAKEY-WAKEY!' like a lunatic.

She clambers onto my bed and straddles me, squeezing the air out of my lungs and making me groan.

'Happy birthday!' She shakes me. 'I got you PRESENTS!' she exclaims, and I stare at her blearily as she beams down at me, her light-brown eyes shining with excitement. 'I got you this.' She places one wrapped package on my chest. 'And this.' Another. 'And this, and this, and this!' She piles them up all over my face. I laugh and try to sit up, but she's still on top of me.

'Get off!' I grumble good-naturedly, shoving at her knees. She giggles and complies, then thrusts a present in my face.

'I swear you get more enjoyment out of my birthdays than I do,' I say wryly, taking it from her.

'Open it!' she urges.

That was a year ago. A year ago to the day. And, hours later, my mum was taken from me, never to be returned. My chest shakes violently as I sob.

I have no idea how much time passes, but a sense of

responsibility begins to mingle with my grief at the realisation that my little brothers will be up soon. The thought of them seeing me like this is enough to stem the flow of my tears. I push the damp pillow away from my face and reach for my phone. The digital display reads 06:30, so, if they're not awake now, they will be soon. I need to pull myself together.

My body feels like lead as I drag myself from bed and stumble through to the bathroom. I flick on the light switch, flinching at the brightness and then recoiling at the state of my reflection in the mirror. I turn on the tap and reach for a flannel, hoping to cool down my splotchy, puffy face.

I can hardly believe how much my life has changed in the last twelve months. I thought my mum had taken the secret of my biological father's identity with her to her grave and, after my initial shock and grief had passed, I became angry. I hit out at the only parental figure left in my life: my stepdad, Stu.

But last summer he came clean. He'd known the truth all along, that my real dad is Johnny Jefferson, the legendary, infamous rock star. Suddenly I had a new dad and a stepmum, Meg, and the cutest little half-brothers you could ever imagine in Barney and Phoenix. They're British like me, but they live here in Los Angeles and last summer I came to stay with them, to meet them for the first time. Since then I've been back and forth between America and the UK, but now I'm here to stay.

At least I think I am. I start a new school on Tuesday, and for a few moments nerves battle it out with despair to take control of my stomach.

I sigh as I press the cold flannel to my face. It's probably just as well Jack and Agnes are away. They've been in Washington State for the last couple of days, visiting their grandparents, and

initially I was disappointed that they weren't going to be around for my birthday, but the last thing I feel like doing right now is celebrating.

Agnes is a friend I made last summer, and her older brother Jack is... Well, I don't know what he is, actually. Is he my boyfriend? Are we official? Agnes is the only one of our friends here who knows about us, and the reason for this is complicated.

Butterflies swarm into my stomach at the thought of Jack's blue-grey eyes staring down at me, moments before the last time we kissed. It was in the very early hours of January 1st, a few days ago, and the memory of his lips against mine is spine-tinglingly fresh.

I fell pretty hard for him when we met last summer, but things went sour. So, when I returned to start the new school year in England, I tried to forget about him.

But I failed. Even when I started going out with Tom, the universally acknowledged hottest boy in school, I failed.

Anyway, within the space of about two months, certain uncontrollable events at home tore me away from my lovely new boyfriend and brought me back to LA.

Jack plays the lead guitar in an indie rock band called All Hype, and I soon discovered that Eve – the lead singer and Jack's ex – had quit. When Jack overheard me singing with my dad, I found myself being drafted in as Eve's replacement. I had my first gig three weeks ago in San Francisco – a *horrendously* nerve-wracking, but ultimately incredible experience – and afterwards I kind of lost my head. Jack and I have always had chemistry. I'd been fighting it, but the chemistry won out and I ended up kissing him and, in doing so, cheating on Tom, my gorgeous, kind, devoted boyfriend. When I went home for

Christmas, I confessed to Tom what I'd done, but it was the end of our relationship.

I hurt him so much and I still feel sick to my stomach about it. I emailed him the day before yesterday, asking for his forgiveness, but he hasn't replied. I said that I hoped we could still be friends, but I think I'm kidding myself. You don't let someone down that badly and get away with it.

I sigh and dry off my face, returning to the comfort of my warm, snuggly bed, but, as soon as I rest my cheek on my tear-sodden pillow, I'm reminded of what today is: the anniversary of my mother's death. And it will be for every single birthday for the rest of my life.

My throat swells up and tears prick at my eyes, but, before my sorrow takes hold again, I'm diverted by a commotion outside my door.

'Shh!' I hear someone warn. Meg? Johnny?

'I want to go inside!' That was Barney. No doubt about it.

'No!' Meg replies in a loud whisper. 'Let's give her until at least seven o'clock.'

'But I'm going to drop her presents!' he whines at top volume, completely neglecting to keep his voice down.

'Oh, buddy,' I hear Johnny chide gruffly and my automatic reaction is to smile.

'I'm awake!' I call, propping myself up.

The door bursts open and in they spill: the four people I can now call my family, all still dressed head-to-toe in their pyjamas.

Barney, aged four and a half, comes first, tearing into the room and clambering onto my bed, his arms full of brightly-coloured packages and his grin threatening to explode his face.

Then comes Meg with a babbling one-and-a-half-year-old

Phoenix attached to her hip. 'DEZZIE!' he calls, mispronouncing my name and flashing me a mostly toothless smile.

And finally in follows Johnny in a white T-shirt and crumpled grey PJ bottoms, still looking half asleep.

Meg once told me that Johnny rarely used to roll out of bed before midday, but having children has changed all that. She used to work as his personal assistant, but they fell in love and the rest is history.

'Happy birthday!' Barney yells, piling presents up on my chest and scrambling back across the bed to retrieve a few more from his parents. They hand them over with amusement and he returns to place some more on top of me. My heart pinches as I think of Mum doing the same thing last year, but I try not to let my pain show.

'Hey,' Johnny says in a deep voice still thick with sleep, as he wanders over to sit on the bed beside me. He reaches across with one tanned, tattooed arm to ruffle my hair. It's several shades lighter than his and quite a bit longer – his comes to his chin and always looks just-slept-in – but our green eyes are practically identical. His are fixed on me now and they're full of concern. He hasn't missed the fact that I've been crying. He squeezes my shoulder consolingly, but stays silent. I'm glad. Sympathy will only make it worse.

'Hey, you,' Meg says gently, regarding me with her warm brown eyes. She and Phee look so alike, but Barney is the spitting image of Johnny – and me.

Meg doesn't wish me a happy birthday because she knows that it's not a totally happy thing, and she also knows better than to mention my appearance.

Barney has no such qualms. 'Why does your face look funny?'

Before Meg or Johnny can interject, Phoenix distracts everyone by squawking and wriggling to get down from his mother's arms. Meg puts him on the bed and he crawls up the length of my body, pushing presents out of the way until he's pressing his little face to my neck. My arms wrap round his solid, onesie-encased body and suddenly I'm fighting off another very strong urge to cry.

'Phoenix, move!' Barney yells. 'Jessie wants to open her presents!'

I can't help giggling at the rude interruption. Phee sits up perkily and reaches for a rectangular-shaped package in lime-green wrapping paper with a yellow ribbon.

'Yes, you can open it,' I say, passing Barney a bright pink box tied with a purple ribbon. 'Come on, you guys can help me.' We all get stuck in.

Ten minutes later, my eyes are popping out of my head.

I have a new laptop ('for school'), a new iPad ('for fun'), a pampering voucher for two at a posh spa, a black Burberry lambskin biker jacket that I swear I've seen modelled by Cara Delevingne, plus other items like photo frames and fairy lights to cheer up my room.

Now I'm left with one last present.

Barney has unwrapped it to reveal a small velvet box, but Johnny swipes it at this point and hands it to me.

I lift up the lid to see a delicate-looking silver charm bracelet resting inside.

'Whoa.' I take it out of the box. 'It's beautiful!'

There are a few charms attached and I pause at the sight of a tiny, diamanté-studded guitar.

'They're real diamonds,' Meg whispers with a smile.

I gasp. 'I'll be *so* careful not to lose it,' I vow seriously.

'We thought you could collect charms that mean something to you,' Johnny says, as I turn the bracelet around in my fingers and spy the number 16 dangling there. A lump springs up in my throat.

'But that's not the last present,' he adds quickly, taking the bracelet from me and placing it back in the box.

'Disneyland!' Barney interrupts with a gleeful shout.

'BARNEY!' Meg and Johnny bellow at him simultaneously.

He freezes and then stares at them contritely.

'That was supposed to be a surprise!' Meg scolds.

'Disneyland?' I manage to ask, as Johnny tickles Barney's ribs and makes him squeal with hysteria.

'Where are we going?' Johnny asks his tiny son as he falls back on the bed, narrowly missing my head.

'Disneyland!' Barney barks between giggles. Phoenix waddles over to join the fun and Johnny grabs him and tickles him, too.

'VIP access,' Meg says to me knowingly, amid the mayhem.

'What, today?' I ask weakly.

'Yeah! Today!' Barney shouts, scrambling to his feet and proceeding to bounce on my bed.

Oh.

But that's the last thing I feel like doing.

I don't mean to seem ungrateful. I'd love to go to Disneyland sometime, but I'd planned on staying here and having a quiet one today. I can't imagine having fun.

Johnny is completely oblivious to my internal dilemma. 'Who are we seeing today?' he asks Barney.

'Mickey Mouse!' Barney obligingly replies at high volume.

I glance up at my half-brother's beaming face and know that my plans to wallow are shot. How can I possibly disappoint him?

‘What time are we leaving?’ I ask.

‘NOW!’ Barney yells.

‘No, not now,’ Meg says brusquely, making a grab for him. ‘We’ve got to eat breakfast first, and get ready.’

‘And we still have to give Jessie her last present,’ Johnny interjects.

‘What, my last present isn’t Disneyland?’ I ask with confusion.

‘Nope,’ he replies, throwing me a key.

A car key.

A *Fiat* car key?!

I have a sudden vision of the crummy old white Fiat that Stu used to have, but I don’t care! It’s a car! A *car*! I’m sixteen and in America that means I can get my driving licence!

I leap out of bed and all five of us race down the stairs in our PJs to the front door. I wrench it open and my jaw drops.

‘It’s a Fiat 500 Abarth,’ Johnny says proudly.

The model means nothing to me. All I know is that what sits before me is one of the coolest little cars I have ever seen: matt-black with red wing mirrors and a red racing stripe down the side – *nothing*, absolutely nothing, like Stu’s former old banger.

‘I thought it looked kind of cheeky. Like you,’ my dad adds with a shrug.

I squeal, running out of the house, unlocking the car doors with a button on the key as I go. Meg laughs and Johnny chuckles as he follows me, both of us hopping gingerly over the sharp gravel beneath our bare feet. I almost go to the right-hand side of the car, but remember that the driver’s seat is on the left in America. I climb in and Johnny gets in the passenger seat beside me.

‘Like it?’ he asks, grinning across at me.

‘Are you kidding me?’ I gape at him. ‘How soon can I drive it?’

‘Aah, well,’ he replies ominously. ‘I’m afraid you have to jump through a few hoops first. You need a learner’s permit before you can drive on the road, under adult supervision until you do your actual test, of course. But to get your learner’s permit you have to do a Driver’s Education course – six hours of driving lessons with a qualified instructor and a written test. Annie’s told me how it all works over here.’ Annie is his PA.

‘No problems,’ I reply with a grin, glancing to my right to see Meg taking the boys back inside. Johnny spies them, too.

‘Breakfast,’ he notes. ‘Eddie has made you a crazy big stack of pancakes.’

‘Aw,’ I say. I adore their cook. He doesn’t work on weekends so he must’ve prepared them yesterday.

‘You OK?’ Johnny asks quietly, all amusement vanished from his expression.

I nod quickly, tears automatically springing to my eyes. ‘It’s probably best if I don’t talk about it,’ I say in a small voice. I don’t want to lose it again.

‘OK.’ He jerks his head towards the house and reaches for the door handle. ‘Come on. Food first and then we’d better go and see frickin’ Mickey, before Barney spontaneously combusts.’