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opening extract from

Hurricane Wills

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published by

Bloomsbury

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CHAPTER ONE

There's a hurricane smashing through our house. There's a hurricane smashing, trashing, bashing through our house. CRASH! BANG! WALLOP! The doors are slamming, chairs are falling, cushions flying, feet running, voices shouting, 'STOP! STOP! STOP! STOP!'

I'm hiding in my bedroom. I've barricaded my door. I'm not scared, but I don't want to be caught up in it, and I don't want the hurricane turning my room upside down, inside out.

A hurricane can cause total devastation. It can flatten everything in its path. Can you even begin to imagine that? Now try to imagine living with one. I bet you can't.

There's a hammering on my door now. 'Go away!' I yell. 'Leave me alone.' The hammering is harder, louder. I put my hands over my ears to muffle it. I see the door shifting. I run and lean against it. 'You're not coming in!' I yell. 'Go and take a running jump. Go and take a running jump off a cliff.'

I hear laughter then, and a torrent of words. I don't want to hear them. I press my fingers into my ears to block them out. A heavy kick shudders the door, followed by another.

And then it goes silent. So silent. Pin-drop silent. Is it over? I wait. Not a sound. I wait a few minutes longer, then pull the chair away from the door. I'm about to take hold of the handle, when the door crashes open – WALLOP on to my fist – and a deafening BOO! makes my heart boomerang across my chest. A grinning face shoves itself into mine and shouts, 'GOTCHA!', before it yahoos and giddy-ups all the way down the stairs.

'Why don't you grow up?' I bellow after it. 'Why can't you be normal?' I growl under my breath, nursing my bruised fist.

I hide my book under the bed. There's no point in trying to read now, and I don't want the pages scribbled on. I make my way downstairs into the living room. There are cushions all over the floor. The coffee table is upside down. Mum's favourite photograph of me and my brother is in the fireplace. The glass is broken into hundreds of pieces. Mum is sitting on the sofa and I can see that she has been crying. Wills is cuddled up next to her, but I know she doesn't want him there. Not after what he's done, even if he can't help it.

'Mum's cross with you, Chris,' he says smugly. 'Chris cross Chris cross.'

I look at my mother, who shakes her head dully.

'No, she's not,' I say.

'She is, she is, she is,' insists my brother. 'Cross as cross can be, Chris, because you made all this mess and spilt popcorn all over the kitchen floor and it's all sticky wicky.'

I don't bother to argue. 'Shall I make you a cup of tea, Mum?' I ask.

'That would be nice, thank you,' she sighs.

'It's the least he can do, isn't it, Mum?' says Wills.

My mother doesn't reply. Wills stares at her, right in the eyes, waiting for an answer, then he pulls her arm round him and says, 'I'm sorry, Mum. I didn't mean to do it.' He begins to cry, and so does she, and I feel like joining in.

CHAPTER TWO

My brother has ADD. Mum says it stands for Attention Deficit Disorder. I say it stands for Acts Daft and Dumb, which isn't very clever but it tells it like it is, and you try coming up with something better. Wills is thirteen, eighteen months older than me, but sometimes he acts like he's six years younger. Sometimes he acts like he's only two. Less even! Imagine throwing your food across the room when you're thirteen. You just wouldn't, would you? Not unless you were so, so, so mad with someone that you threw it at them because you couldn't help yourself, but even then you probably wouldn't because you'd be too worried that you'd get what for. Wills doesn't care about

getting what-for. He's had what-for so many times, but it doesn't make any difference at all. Mum says it's like water off a duck's back, because most of the time he doesn't seem to notice it, and if he does, he just shakes it off. I don't think he actually likes getting into trouble, but he can't always stop himself, so he ignores the consequences.

The worst thing is that Wills looks older than he is. He's nearly six feet tall, and big too. Not like the rest of us. Mum's five feet nothing and as thin as a goalpost, Dad's only five feet eight and shaped like a skittle, and I'm only just taller than Mum. Wills has a moustache already, though he hates anyone to mention it. Mum says it shows up because he's got dark hair. Dad used to have dark hair too, before it stopped growing, which Dad says was because Wills sent it into shock. My hair's fair like Mum's, and curly too, which is a pain, because Wills takes the mickey out of me and calls me Curly Girly. Anyway, when Wills misbehaves, which is often, people tut even more because they think he's a sixteen-year-old behav-

ing like a two-year-old, rather than a thirteen-year-old behaving like a two-year-old, which is bad enough. It doesn't worry Wills though. He just grins and tuts back. Once, in a supermarket, he picked up a huge, and I mean HUGE, jar of pickled onions and held it up to Mum because he wanted her to buy it. When she said no, he dropped it. I don't know if he did it on purpose, but it smashed to smithereens and pickled onions shot across the floor. I wanted to die of embarrassment, and Mum stood there in horror. Wills thought it was hilarious. He started kicking the onions under the shelves and shouting, 'Goal!', even though Mum told him to stop. Then he grabbed one and shouted, 'Catch!' to me. I missed and it hit an old woman – SPLAT! – in the chest. Everyone tutted and said it was disgraceful behaviour for a boy of Wills's age and that Mum should learn to control her children. Wills just thought it was my fault because I was such a lousy catch. He always blames me.

We can't go to that supermarket any more. Even though Mum apologised, they told her that

she and her unruly children weren't welcome, and Mum won't go there again anyway because she says she has her pride. Now we have to go to a supermarket five miles away, and I know Mum isn't very happy about it but she doesn't complain.

Sometimes it makes Mum angry when people say she should learn to control her children. 'What do they know about what I have to deal with?' she says. It makes me angry too, because it's not me causing the trouble and I hate being lumped together with Wills, and also because I know what Mum has to deal with. If other people knew what she had to deal with, they'd think she was amazing. I think she's amazing. So does Dad, because he couldn't deal with it.

'I take my hat off to your mum,' he says. 'She deserves a medal for putting up with what she puts up with and coping like she does.'

I reckon I deserve a medal too, for putting up with what I put up with. I'm the one Wills picks on. I'm the one whose homework he scribbles on. I'm the one whose things he takes without asking.

I'm the one whose bedroom he turns upside down when he's lost something of his own. I'm the one who's made to look a fool at school, in the street, in the shops.

'This is my baby brother,' he'll say. 'Isn't he cute? And he's such a goody-goody.' He'll tickle me under the chin, then thump me hard on the arm, or stamp on my foot, and run off laughing with his horrible friends. Or he'll grab my school-bag and take my work out. 'Look at this,' he'll say to his horrible friends. 'Ten out of ten for spelling. He's so clever, my baby brother.'

I hate Wills when he's like that. Hate him, hate him, HATE HIM. Wish he'd never been born. Wish I didn't have to live with him. You'd feel the same, I bet you.

But sometimes, especially when he's not with his so-called friends, Wills gets all sorry, really sorry, and puts his arm round me and says, 'Sorry, bruv, I didn't mean to,' and stuffs a bag of marshmallows into my hand, or a packet of chewing gum.

'Are you sure they're not poisoned?' I'll say, or, 'You haven't licked them, have you?'