THE DISCONNECT

Keren David

Barrington Stoke

First published in 2019 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

Text © 2019 Keren David

The moral right of Keren David to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in any part in any form without the written permission of the publisher

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-78112-855-8

Printed in China by Leo

To Deborah and Jeremy, at the start of your new adventure

CONTENTS

1.	Decisions	1
2.	The Disconnect	6
3.	Dad	13
4.	@murraylove	18
5.	Family matters	23
6.	Hello FOMO	29
7.	Addiction	38
8.	Support group	45
9.	Identity theft	51
10.	Spies	59
11.	Running	67
12.	Choices	71
13.	Info check	77
14.	Snap cheat	89
15.	Download	98
16.	Delete and reset	106
17.	Connected	109
18.	Selfie	114

1
Decisions

I take a selfie.

And another.

I look awful. I can't go out like this. It's the top I'm wearing. Shaquilla can wear sexy stuff like this, but on me it just looks silly. I haven't got the body for it. I don't fill it up. It makes me look stupid. Like a kid dressing up.

I change my top to a plain white T-shirt. Apply more bronzer. Try to remember how to contour my cheekbones.

Selfie.

My lipstick's wrong. Too pink. Where's that other one?

Selfie.

OK, that'll do.

I find our group – me, Natalie, Sophie, Shaquilla. Press send.

Wait. One … Two … Three—

My phone buzzes with a message from Dad. Ignore it. I haven't got time right now for a long chat.

Message from Natalie: *Gorgeous as per, babe, but what is that top?*

I message back: *Just an old one of Rosa's. Not going to wear it …*

Panic. What can I wear?

Message from Shaquilla: *What about that black one from H&M you bought last week?*

She's reading my mind. That was the one I had on first of all.

I message back: *Not sure it works.*

Messages from Shaquilla, Natalie and Sophie, all saying the same thing: *Show us!*

I pull the top on. It's too tight. It's too low cut. It's not me. I should never have bought it.

Selfie.

Oh God. Try again.

Selfie, leaning forward, looking down. Send it.

Natalie: *That's the one!*

Shaquilla: *Stunning!*

Sophie: *Yes! Babe!*

I look in the mirror. What do they see that I don't see? But three against one … OK. It works. OK, I'll wear it.

I message: *Thanks, guys!*

Dad's FaceTiming me. I press the red button to decline.

I message Dad: *Sorry, I'm busy now. Talk later.*

Deep breaths. Find word game app. Play three rounds. Feel calmer.

I go downstairs. Mum's having breakfast, looking at her phone.

"New pictures of Zack!" Mum says, beaming. She's the proudest grandma in London.

"I know," I reply. "Rosa sent them to me too. So cute!" I'm the proudest auntie as well. It's so sad that we've never met Zack. My sister Rosa lives in New York now, which was where Zack was

born – and Dad lives there too. Half my family is a whole ocean away.

"But there's another nasty review of the cafe," Mum says. "It's terrible. Avi's sure these reviews are fake. He's so worried."

Avi is my stepdad, and he and Mum opened their own cafe six months ago. It was their dream. But things aren't going to plan, and they're struggling to get customers. I try to help out as much as I can, but you can't drag people in off the street and make them eat. And even one bad review seems to scare people off.

"Oh, that's awful," I say.

Mum looks up.

"Esther!" she says. "What are you wearing?"

"It's my new top. I like it!" I try to sound as if I mean it.

"It's ..." Mum begins. "You look like you're going to the beach!"

"It's a crop top, Mum."

"More like a bikini top."

"Well, I like it," I tell her. "And I'm wearing it. So you'll just have to cope with it."

“Do you really think it’s suitable?” Mum asks. “I don’t want old men leering at you.”

“Yes, it’s fine,” I say, and I blow her a kiss. “I’m 16, Mum. I can choose my own clothes.”

“Well, I’m not sure about it,” she says. “Oh, hang on, Avi’s texted me.”

And Mum goes back to looking at her phone.