FROM THE AUTHOR OF **ORANGEBOY**

EIGHT PIECES OF SILVA

EIGHT REASONS TO FIND HER...

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Becks, Mum says, **fix up. Don't complain, just fix up. We've been clearing up after you for fifteen years**.

That ain't strictly true. Well, for Mum, it's true, but Justin's more recent. It's been seven years clearing up for him. I got home from school and found Justin's morning toast and Marmite balanced on the edge of the table. Cornflakes box knocked over like the cereal's trying to escape. Milk left out. It's like breakfast tried to commit suicide.

I'd sent a message to Mum straight away. **Silva didn't do the clearing up. She's in her room sulking.**

That's when Mum told me to fix up. When I replied, she said the plane's taking off and the steward's walking towards her with a look on his face. I know Mum. She'll turn the phone off because she can never find flight mode and then shove it in the seat pocket in front. She won't turn it on again until her and Justin land in Japan. That's gonna be more than twelve hours.

I suppose I should leave them alone. It's the first few hours of their honeymoon. If it's still a honeymoon when you're heading out nearly two months after you got married. But Silva, though! I was a witness, standing right next to her when she promised our parents she'd make sure I was good

while they're away. She even looked them in the eye when she promised. But what's she done instead? She's left dying breakfast all over the kitchen for me to find when I get home from school. I don't want her setting that as a mood for the next two weeks. Though, thinking about it, even mush-up cornflakes and bad milk is better than some of the moods she's been cracking recently.

Damn. It's gonna be a long two weeks if Silva keeps her sulk up all that time.

I knock on her bedroom door, not too hard, though. I hate the fact I got to knock at all. It's a recent thing. She says she don't want me to rush in and disturb her studying. *Studying*. Like I'm gonna believe that. The last few times I was allowed to walk in without knocking, my sister was lying on her bed studying the inside of her eyelids. The time before that she was studying her own sweet face in the mirror. Proper studying, like she'd seen a really small, but seriously deep blackhead that no tweezers forged on earth would ever shift. A few months ago, she tried to get Justin to put a bolt on her door, but he refused. (Though that's probably because Mum's better with a hand drill than he is.) Now Silva just pushes a chair against the door when she don't want no one to come in. And that's all of the time now. Even Justin, her very own father, has to knock.

Silva don't answer. She could have gone out, but the front door wasn't double-locked when I came in. I could knock harder. I *want* to knock harder. I stop myself. *Remember,*

Becks! Mum and Justin have only just started their honeymoon. I mustn't topload my stress on to the first day. I need to stretch my grudges out over the next fortnight. And Silva having a mood ain't exactly news.

I clear up the breakfast, but I do it loud so I know Silva can hear me. She don't feel guilty enough to come out and help, though. I go into the sitting room and curl myself up in the armchair. It don't feel right being in here by myself. It's too quiet. I turn on the TV, but it's *Eggheads*. Those giant heads looking down at their quiz teammates freak me out. Too much face detail, man. I don't want to see no strangers' pores.

I turn off the TV and read Mum's messages again. Rome airport is boring and the staff haven't got manners. Her bra wire set off the alarm and the woman security guard gave her the roughest, most public handle she's ever had. I love my mother, but that's a bit too much information.

I wonder if Mum sent Silva her own message, or maybe Justin did instead. Mum to me. Justin to Silva. Even though me and Silva are sharing parents, it don't always feel that way.

Maybe Silva's doing exactly what I'm doing in her own room, reading her dad's texts, the same way I'm reading my mum's in here. She could be feeling down after saying goodbye to her dad at the airport. Justin says I should give her space when she gets like that.

It's gonna take a while to get used to Mum and Justin

being properly married. I don't know why. They've been together since I was seven and he's lived here since I was nine. A wedding shouldn't change things, though Mum did give me a hundred quid to get my hair braided and she's never done that before. I took some sharp snaps of my new style when it was fresh. Now it's all itching like hell, but I can't take it out yet. I gotta get Mum's money's worth. Silva didn't need nothing done to her hair so she got money for wedding clothes. She went up to Fonthill Road and found a bargain on two dresses. I wore a tux. She wore a cream bodycon number. It almost looked like we were the ones getting married. Tell you what, I almost did wear a dress to crumble them gay girl stereotypes, but when I saw Silva in her gear – yeah, she did look good – I decided there and then to stick with my suit. I want clothes that let me walk. And breathe.

The intercom in the hallway buzzes. It's the grocery shop delivery. I don't know why Mum thought she had to stock up even more. If I add one more tin of beans to the cupboard, the whole thing's gonna sink through the floor and squash Mr Bottler on his sofa below.

It's a short, white woman who's hoisting our bags out the crates today. It's never been a woman before. Her jacket looks a bit too big, like they only got sizes to fit men. Even so, I got a feeling she don't take crap from no one. She smiles at me and says, 'Good afternoon.' Her accent sounds Polish. She offers to bring the shopping into the

kitchen, but as our kitchen's a) about three centimetres away from the front door and b) too small to fit me, the delivery woman and the groceries, I let her leave the bags in the hallway. It's tempting to stack them all up against Silva's door just in case she needs to get out. *Yeah, Silva, both of us can block up doorways*.

Instead, I put away the frozen stuff – vegan, pretend fish fingers and soya mince for Silva and proper, full-fat chocolate ice cream for me – and have a rustle around in the fridge bags. Sausages, real and pretend. A pack of grated cheese. Olive oil spread. Basil. Peach yoghurt. It was like Mum plonked Azog on the keyboard when she was ordering and told her to jump around a bit.

That reminds me. Where is that cat? She should be keeping me company now everyone else has deserted me.

Is it mean to leave the store cupboard stuff for Silva to put away? I've done more than my bit and she's supposed to be the older sister here.

The thing is, I always sort of wanted a sister until I got one. I never wanted another dad, but when Justin came I got one anyway. Before that, my family was just Mum and me, even though I've actually got more parents than most people got cousins.

Starting with the dads, there's DNA-Dad, of course. He left my mum for another girlfriend when I was a baby, but boy that DNA came back to haunt him. Soon after Justin came to live with us, I dropped his new iPhone out the

window. His camera was better at night shots and I wanted a decent picture of the moon. It was a genuine accident. It slipped through my fingers and hit the copper who was just coming out the Costcutter below. He was taking his first sip from his Coke can when he got clonked on the head. He wasn't happy. Neither was the phone. Or Justin.

I got taken to the police station as the copper wouldn't believe it was an accident. Mum was furious but agreed to them swabbing out my mouth. I didn't get charged, but DNA-Dad did. When the police database went 'ping', suddenly the feds knew who'd been wrestling cash boxes from security guards for the last four years.

Now I've got Justin. Justin's seen things. Maybe Justin still does. I reckon he necked a bucket-load of drugs when he set up illegal raves in the 80s. I asked Silva about it, but she said she doesn't know. She was born after Justin had settled down and started running media projects for kids who'd been thrown out of school. Silva's mum was a lawyer who came in to talk to the kids about their rights. She was. She's not a lawyer no more. She's not an alive person no more. It hurts when I think about it.

Because, my mum—

If anything ever happened to my mum—

Technically, I have other mums. DNA-Dad's been married twice, but I wasn't invited to none of them weddings. Me and them mums wouldn't recognise each other if we were standing side by side in a queue in Argos.

But my mum—

Yeah, she's DNA-Mum too, but DNA stands for Do Not Associate her with the wasteman who seeded me.

How can I explain what my mum means to me?

When I was five, I kept having nightmares about the apocalypse. I couldn't even pronounce the word, but I knew it was gonna come. Death rays, poison gas, nuclear fallout, the whole bag. Night after night, I'd wake up crying, sometimes even wet the bed, until Mum invented the Indestructible Duvet Cover. It was a massive, faded yellow thing we'd half-inched from Grandma. Every night after my bath, she'd dim down my night light, we'd wriggle inside the cover and she'd do up the poppers over our heads. That way, she said, no bad chemical voodoo would seep through and twist up our brains. Then she'd tell me a story. Not from a book. A brain and heart story. And in every story, I was the hero who made things right.

So when Mum said Silva was coming to live with us because Silva's mum had got ill, I wanted to make everything right. Mum was really happy when Justin was around. I liked him and wanted her to be happy too. So it was my mission to make Silva happy too. You don't need to share blood to start hurting when your sister's ghosting you.

I stomp past the bags of baked beans and live-forever (as long as you don't open it) oat milk and stand outside Silva's door. I hold up my fist to give it the full knockdown. Then I think about it some more. Her parents were together for ages

but never got round to getting married and then it was too late. But now Justin's married my mum instead of Silva's. How would I feel if that was me?

I let my hand drop down. I'll leave her alone until she's ready.

I go back into the kitchen and scrape the crispy lumps of old Sheba out the cat bowl. It's like Azog's too lazy to bother chewing and just licks the gravy off. Last year, Silva tried to turn my cat vegan with this special cat food. Azog crept into Silva's room and defiled her bed badly, I reckon on purpose. My cat got a lifetime ban from Silva's room but a happy return to her meaty chunks.

I return to the sitting room. Ain't those Mum's sandals and bra under the TV? She must have given up trying to jam them into her rucksack. Suddenly, I need to sit down. Mum's married. She's backpacking through east Asia, eight hours ahead of me. My sister's locked herself in her room and don't want to talk to me.

I wish Mum was here with me now.