

***DAY 1** – 6.30 p.m.*
Leidseplein Theatre, AMSTERDAM

'Thank you, Amsterdam, and goodnight!'

Charley Parker bounded off stage with a grin from ear to ear. While most twelve-year-olds dreamed of being rockstars, Charley was living it. She had just performed to around three hundred fans (and some of their parents) in a beautiful Dutch theatre and, as she flopped on to a couch backstage, she could still hear the cheers bouncing down the hallway.

'That went well.'

Charley smiled at her best friend, George, who was half hidden behind his camera. 'Are you gonna follow

me everywhere with that thing?' she asked, pretending not to enjoy the attention.

'How about a message for your Dutch fans?' prompted George as he started filming.

Charley tried to remember how to pronounce the Dutch for thank you. '*Dank je wel*,' she said carefully, blowing a kiss for good measure.

'Great,' replied George. 'Now let's go and meet them.'

'At least let me have a drink first,' cried Charley in mock exasperation. She picked up a bottle of sparkling water that was waiting for her on the table next to the couch, with a bowl of trail mix and some bananas.

She twisted the cap, and a torrent of fizzing water spurted, sprayed and spouted all over her, the couch and the floor. The bottle had looked innocent enough when it was sitting on the table, but it had apparently been transported to the theatre by a donkey trotting on cobblestones.

Charley stared down at the bottle and her hands, then up at the droplets of water now falling from her fringe.

'Actually,' she said softly to the camera, 'I might have to dry myself off before I do anything.'

Charley and George burst into a gale of laughter, in much the same way as the bottle had just exploded

with an outpouring of bubbles.

When they managed to catch their breath again, George stopped filming and lowered the camera. 'Well,' he said, 'if that doesn't go viral, I don't understand the internet.'

He posted the video online while Charley looked around the dressing room for a towel, strands of her jet-black hair (with a purple streak) now plastered to her forehead. Unable to find one, Charley wiped her face on the only thing that was handy – the jacket belonging to her manager and promoter, Sam Mullane.

'That's my best jacket!' exclaimed Sam, walking in at exactly that moment. He grabbed it and put it on, grimacing at the wet patch Charley had left on the sleeve.

'I wish I'd filmed that,' said George.

'I'm glad you didn't.' Sam frowned.

A small bleeping noise came from the camera, signalling that the video had uploaded.

'Done,' said George. 'I titled it, "Charley's Bubble Trouble".'

Sam glanced at George, then Charley, then the puddle on the floor, and for a second he looked as though it all may have been his fault. As if maybe, just maybe, he had forgotten to buy snacks and drinks for

Charley before the show and had run to a nearby shop and back while Charley was on stage, shaking the bottle and causing it to erupt the moment it was opened.

At least that's what it looked like to Charley.

'Come on then,' said Sam. 'There's a foyer full of fans to meet.'

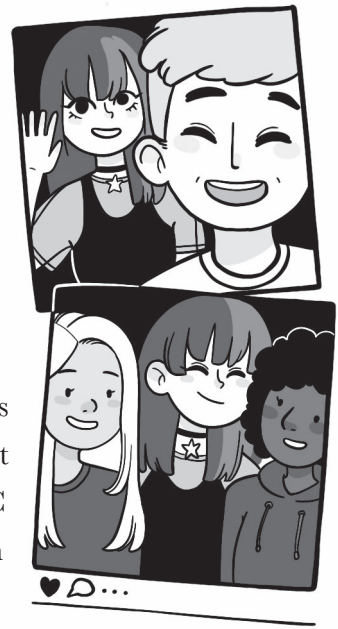
Charley, George and Sam made their way along the corridor and through the door to the foyer, where they were met by a throng of excited young fans. It was an orderly throng, though. A throng in a neat straight line. Charley had been warned that Dutch audiences were particularly polite. During the show, she'd noticed that they were quiet through each song – no interrupting whoops or whistles – but would burst into rapturous applause when each song ended.

Maybe that's what the sparkling water was doing, Charley thought. *Bottling it all up until the end of the show, then exploding.*

One by one, the fans came forward, introduced themselves and asked for a selfie. Charley obliged and made sure to say something positive to everyone who approached, like 'I like your earrings, Kimo' or 'Thank you for your Instagram post, Marlou.' She knew how much a kind word from your favourite star could mean.

Of course, wherever Charley went, George was

sure to follow, usually with his camera in hand. He perched in the corner of the foyer, filming at just the right distance to capture everything without making Charley's fans feel intimidated.



As the queue came to an end, Sam appeared at Charley's shoulder. 'Don't forget we've got that interview with Radio K-CAC for the US tour,' he said. 'We can do it backstage.'

'Oh yes,' exclaimed Charley. 'I nearly forgot!'

Although she had already posed with everyone who wanted a photo, there were still a few fans lingering in the foyer to catch one last glimpse of her: Charley Parker, the girl who had recently rocketed to stardom.

'Thanks, everyone.' Charley smiled. 'I hope to see you all again.'

As the group smiled and waved, one lone voice cut through: 'Thank you for coming to Amsterdam. It seems you made quite a *splash*!'

There were laughs all round.

'That was quick,' Charley said to George with a grin. 'Turns out you *do* understand the internet.'

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George Carling focused his camera on his best friend and zoomed in a little.

Charley had returned to the backstage couch and was perched over Sam's battered old phone, which was wedged between the bananas and the trail mix. Sam always insisted Charley's phone interviews be conducted on speakerphone, so he could hear everything that was said.

'You're listenin' to Ronnie Dee on Radio K-CAC,' said a very excited American woman, 'and I'm joined live from Amsterdam by the one and only Charley P.'

'Hello!' said Charley.

'So, for our listeners who don't know, how did you become *so* famous *so* quickly, Charley?'

Charley flashed her eyes to George. Not only did he know the answer, he *was* the answer. 'Well,' she began, 'it all started when my friend George filmed me singing in our classroom one day, and posted the video online.'

George had first spotted Charley Parker across the schoolyard of Rokesbourne High School. One of the advantages of using a wheelchair was that sometimes he saw the world on a different level to everyone else. (This was also one of the reasons George thought he'd make a good comedian one day.)

While all other heads were turned towards the football rocketing across the concrete, or the tennis ball flying through the air, George saw Charley. She was the new girl, dark-haired (already with a purple streak) and wearing Doc Martens, sitting on her own and singing to herself. She didn't seem to realize anyone was watching her, and probably thought that no one cared anyway.

George cared. And he saw. And he listened. And, one day, George had an idea.

'Oh my *godddd*,' crowed Ronnie Dee from K-CAC. 'You guys sing in the classroom? English schools sound like so much fun. Do you know Harry Potter?'

'Um . . . no. I think he goes to a different school,' answered Charley, catching George's eye and grinning. 'And I wasn't actually singing during a lesson. I just happened to be eating lunch in the classroom that day.'

George could still picture the whole scene in his mind. The day had been particularly blustery and the wind had whipped up the students' energy like a mini tornado. Which was why George had decided to have lunch in Miss Fairburn's classroom. (Being susceptible to other people's energy was another asset he thought would make him a good comedian.)

When Charley had walked into the classroom, belting out a song George had never heard before, he