Pushed to the edge, the truth always comes out

TRAPPED

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For Jodie Hodges

CHAPTER 1

The show was over. The old people had loved it. The twenty-five teenagers who made up the Hightop Youth Singers stood in the hall of the retirement home, waiting to leave.

"The bus will be here in a few minutes!" Miss Griffin called from the front door. "Please wait quietly!"

Hailey Jones was fed up. She was with her friends, Rosie and Samira, at the back of the line. Hailey was watching everyone chatter away. Well, she was mostly watching Kit, a few people along from her. She'd had a crush on Kit for ages. It was partly the way his wavy hair flopped over his eyes. And partly that big grin of his, which lit up his whole face when he spoke.

"No way, Samira!" Rosie laughed as she held up her phone. "Look at this photo!"

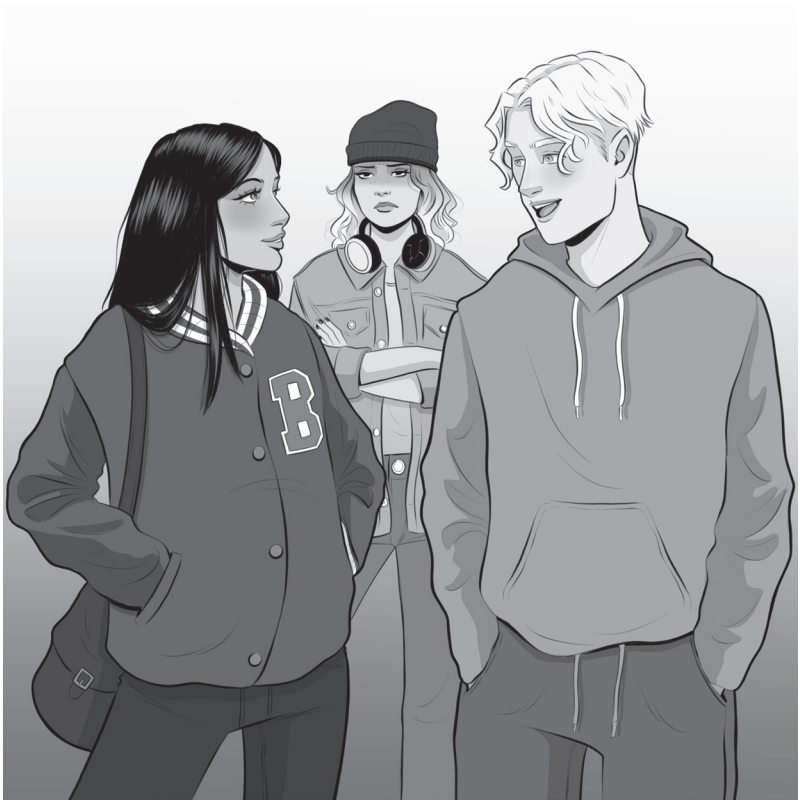
Rosie and Samira had been arguing all day about whose dog was the cutest.

"Puh-lease!" Samira groaned. "Check out the ears on my Lexi."

Rosie and Samira carried on arguing. Hailey tuned them out. She inched a bit closer to Kit. Two weeks ago at singing practice, he'd spent the whole time making silly faces at her across the room to see if she'd giggle. He'd even said something about going to a party together at the weekend. She'd really thought he liked her.

But then Bex Bickerton had joined the Hightop Youth Singers, and Kit had totally lost interest in Hailey.

"You sounded awesome in the last song." Kit was talking to Bex right now. Of course he was. Everyone wanted to talk to Bex. She was the new star of their show – the only one able to hit the high notes that made audiences gasp



and cheer. Plus, she was pretty with sleek dark hair, great big eyes and huge curly eyelashes.

Hailey knew she was being mean, but she didn't like Bex. Or the way everyone else thought she was so great.

"Do you really think I sounded all right, Kit?" Bex blushed as she asked.

It looked as if Bex had a big crush on Kit. Just like Hailey did.

Hailey looked down at her shoes. She felt dull and boring and totally down in the dumps. If Bex liked Kit, Hailey didn't stand a chance with him.

"The bus is here now! Let's go!" Miss Griffin clapped her hands to make everyone listen. "Come along, we're already late."

Hailey plodded along with everyone else, her hands deep in her pockets.

The Hightop Youth Singers was a local group that performed songs from musicals. Bex had only joined them two weeks ago, but everyone said it was like she'd been with the group for ever. They all went on about what a great singer she was and how she was so sweet and friendly.

Well, it wasn't very sweet and friendly to take Kit away from Hailey.

"Everyone onto the bus! Quick as you can!" Miss Griffin called. She opened the front door of the retirement home and a gust of cold air blew inside. Hailey tugged her jacket around her. It was the middle of November – cold and dark – and the end-of-term holidays were still a long way off.

As Hailey followed the others to the door, Mrs Pozinski, the manager of the retirement home, came panting up. She pushed past Hailey and went up to Bex and Kit.

"I *had* to tell you." She beamed at Bex. "Your singing is *very special*." Mrs Pozinski put her hand over her heart as if she was swelling with pride. "I, myself, used to perform

in musicals when I was young, and I can tell you have an outstanding talent."

Hailey gritted her teeth. Nobody had ever said that about *her*.

"Yeah, Bex is amazing," Kit said, with his big grin.

"Oh, er, right, thanks," Bex said. She sounded awkward and bored. Like she was fed up with compliments from stupid strangers and just wanted to get back to chatting with handsome Kit.

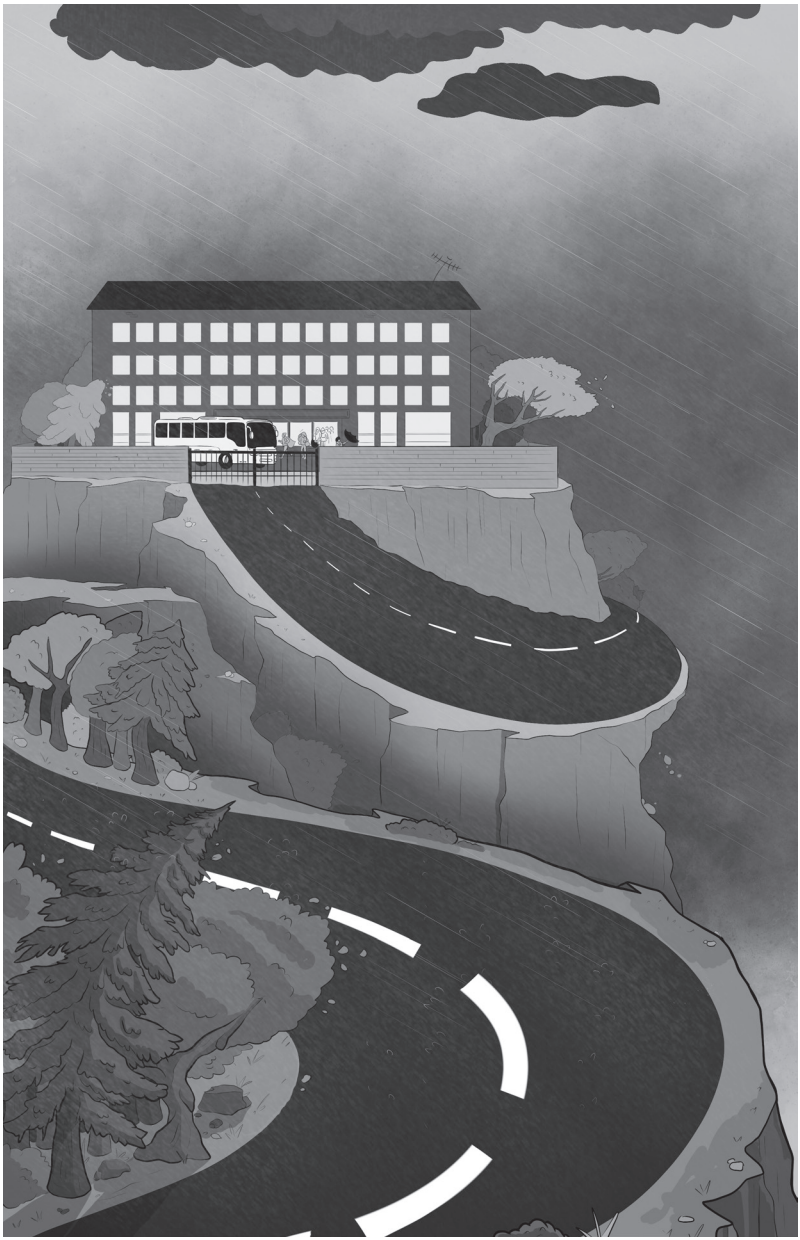
Hailey walked past them and went outside. The air was cold and a light drizzle was falling.

Feeling the misty damp on her face, Hailey pulled up the hood of her jacket and headed across the tarmac towards the bus. It was only 5.30 p.m. but already dark and gloomy.

The inside lights of the bus were on and the engine rumbling. Miss Griffin was up by the door, waving her arms as she ushered people on board.

"Hurry up, everyone!" she cried. "We want to get on our way before the storm sets in." She looked up and down the road in an anxious way.

The retirement home was set at the top of a cliff overlooking the sea. A steep zig-zag



road led down to the town where most of the members of the singing group lived.

Hailey joined the end of the line getting on the bus. The rain fell harder and the wind blew stronger, cold against Hailey's cheeks. Up ahead of her, Rosie and Samira were arguing about whether Labrador or spaniel puppies were cuter. There was a time when Hailey would have joined in, but right now, thanks to Bex, she felt too depressed.

"Come *on*, please!" Miss Griffin called. "Kit! Bex! Hurry, we need to get going *now*!"