It's Anna's life. But it's her mum's brand.

DANGEROUS INFLUENCE



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CHAPTER 1

My mum started her YouTube account when I was two years old. My sister Josie was four. At first, it was mostly about Josie.

If you haven't seen my mum's channel, it's called "Messages from Motherhood". It's all about being a mum. And it's about us. Me and Josie.

Mum posts two videos a week, on Tuesday and Friday. Sometimes, companies send her things for her to review. When we were little, people would send us toys, and we'd have to say nice things about them. Even if they were too babyish or didn't work.

Sometimes, Mum does stuff about our daily life. Videos of us playing with our toys when we were little. Videos of us on holiday. Videos where she's making dinner or talking to us about how we feel about SATs, or Covid, or whatever.

Mum does lots of silly short plays with Josie. She calls them skits. She used to try and do them with me too, but I am *terrible* at acting. Often, she just talks to the camera about how hard it is being our mum. Which is nice.

Sometimes, she gives parenting advice. I don't know why anyone would ever listen to her parenting advice. Can't people see that someone who films their kids and puts them on the internet *has* to be a terrible mum?

But apparently not. People love my mum. They're always saying how great she is, how funny she is, how cute we were when we were little.

Well. How cute Josie was.

I'm not cute.

I mean, maybe I was cute when I was tiny. But now I'm thirteen. I'm covered in spots, my hair is always greasy and I look weird no matter what I wear.

Mum tries her best with me. When I was little, she used to spend hours brushing my hair and putting it in plaits and things for videos. Now, she's always taking me shopping and

to fancy hairdressers. It would be nice if she didn't insist on filming all our trips and doing "shopping-haul" videos.

This is the problem with being influencer-famous. Nothing is ever just for you. Every time Mum gives me something or does something nice with me, she always has to film it.

When I was little, I didn't know any better. I thought it was normal to have to talk to people in your mum's phone.

"People want to know if you liked our day out at Fuzzy Farm Christmas Adventure!" Mum would say. Then me and Josie would have to tell the camera about it.

Or, "People want to know if you're excited about starting school!" And I'd have to tell them.

I guess I just assumed everyone had cameras pointing at them all the time. Looking back, that was kind of a weird thing to think, but I didn't know any better.

When I was about five, I remember telling my friends how boring it was having to say things to "people on Mum's phone" all the time. They didn't know what I was talking about, obviously.

Around that time, Mum tried to explain to me what she did. I think she showed me some of her videos. I wasn't that bothered, really. I mean, I was five. I didn't care what Mum did for a job. I knew what YouTube was, of course. I used to watch Ms Rachel and Numberblocks songs and things like that. But I didn't understand that Mum was *famous*.

Well. That's not quite true. People did stop us when we were out and about. They'd want to take pictures with Mum and tell her how much they loved her videos. They still do. I hated it then, and I hate it now. Mum is always very nice to the people who talk to her, but afterwards she grumbles about it.

"Why is it *always* when I'm buying tampons?" she says.

Mum thinks she's so funny.

I can still remember the day my friends found out about Mum's videos. I was eight.

Lots of the kids at school watched YouTube. *I* watched YouTube. But they mostly watched videos about Minecraft and things like that. A few of the girls had started watching videos

about make-up. Nobody watched parenting videos. Why would they?

One day, I went into school, and the other girls were whispering. I went up to them, and they all stopped talking and looked guilty.

"What's going on?" I asked.

They pulled awkward faces. Then Ellie-May said, "Matilda's mum says you can't come to Matilda's party."

I didn't know what to say. I didn't even *know* Matilda's mum. "Why not?" I asked.

"My mum doesn't want your mum doing a video about it," said Matilda. "She saw that video your mum did about Ellie-May's party, and she says you're not coming to mine."

"What video?" I said.

Matilda and Ellie-May managed to look both hurt and judgy at once.

"I'm just saying," Matilda said. "It's not OK, is it? To come to Ellie-May's party and then be mean about it on the internet? I mean, Ellie-May's a *kid*. And your mum's a grown-up."

Matilda was repeating something her mum had said. It's so obvious now.

It wasn't obvious then.

I remember just looking at them, then walking away, trying not to cry.

I asked my mum about it when she picked me up at the end of the day. She looked a bit shocked. "Matilda's mum did *what*?" she said.

"She said I wasn't allowed to go to Matilda's party."

"That bitch! How low can you get?" Mum said. "If she's angry with me – fine, be angry with me. But how much of a cow do you have to be to take it out on an eight year old?"

I felt a bit better, hearing Mum talk like that. My mum wasn't the bitch. Matilda's mum was.

"But what did you say about Ellie-May's party in the video, Mum?" I asked.

She wouldn't tell me.

I looked it up when I got home.

Ellie-May had a pamper party for her ninth birthday. That was the cool thing to do in Year Four. We all went to a make-up salon. We each got a face mask and a makeover. They painted our nails with cool patterns. There were mocktails and cupcakes.

I was a bit bored, to be honest. I've always been kind of young for my age. I still liked playing Barbies and building dens back then. I liked the drinks and cupcakes at the salon, but waiting around for my makeover was boring. And I didn't like how I looked with make-up on. It felt weird and too grown up. But I did like my sparkly nails. And I liked us all taking silly pictures of ourselves.

When I got home, Mum set up her camera to ask me about it.

"So Anna's just been to her first pamper party!" Mum said behind the screen. "Tell us all about it, Anna! Did you like it?"

"It was all right," I said. "There was a lot of hanging around. We got make-up. And cake."

"And cake!" Mum laughed. "That sounds fun. Is that what you want to do for your birthday?"

I shook my head. "No way!"

"No way?" Mum said. "Why not?"

I shrugged. "I dunno. It was a bit boring."

And that was that.

I didn't really think about what was going to happen to that video. I knew Mum put them on the internet. But I don't think I'd realised that *anyone* could watch. Including Ellie-May's mum.

The finished video was Mum complaining about pamper parties and how they were far too grown up for little kids like me. She showed all these videos of me playing with my toys, and then she put up the pictures I'd brought home from the party of me in the make-up. And then – oh God! – she played the video of me talking about the party.

No wonder Ellie-May wasn't speaking to me!

I went downstairs. "I saw that video you made about the party," I said.

Mum's face tightened. I guess it hadn't occurred to her that I could watch it too.

"Why did you put it on the internet?" I shouted. "Where she could *see* it!"

"I put all my videos on the internet," Mum said. "You know that!"

"But now Ellie-May hates me!" I shouted. "And her mum hates me. All the girls hate me! And Matilda's mum says I can't go to Matilda's party!"

"Look, Anna—" said Mum, but I wouldn't let her finish.

"I hate you!" I shouted. "And I hate your stupid videos! I wish you weren't my mum!"

That was the first time I told her I hated her.

It wouldn't be the last.