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opening extract from

Fame School: Reach for the Stars

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1 Born to Sing

Chloe stood alone, a small figure in black jeans and a pink top. As the music began, she was almost completely still, with her arms loosely at her sides, only one heel moving slightly to the beat. Her pixie face, topped by her trademark, tousled brown hair seemed tiny in front of the massive speakers. Camera Two was swooping down behind her, filming the vast crowd of people swaying to the intro. But Chloe was totally focused. Her fans, and the song, deserved everything from her.

She turned to where she knew Camera One was waiting. At once her face appeared in close-up on the huge screen behind her. A collective sigh went up from

her audience. She raised the microphone reverently, close to her mouth. The first lines were delivered softly, pleadingly, and then, halfway through the first verse, the power of the song took over.

Her face was full of emotion, and in her mind her voice soared, filling the vast auditorium with pure sound. She was looking right into the camera, opening her heart for everyone at home, as well as those who had come to the concert. The crowd was rapt, totally in her hands. She was giving the performance of her life.

"Chloe, can I borrow this?" Jess was holding up a pale blue Indian scarf. Camera, stage, crowd, everything vanished.

Chloe stood for a second, trying to bring back the imagined performance, but the moment had gone. It was no use. Jess had barged right in front of the mirror before Chloe had finished miming to it. She put her hairbrush down gently, as if it really were a microphone.

"I hadn't finished," she told Jess, feeling the last wisps of her audience dissolve to nothing. "And it's

important how you sing to a camera. D'you know, I read in a magazine that when you're famous you have to make the camera your friend."

"Sorry." Jess was Chloe's best friend, but even she couldn't see what Chloe was imagining, or hear the song that she was singing inside her head. "Is there still going to be room to dance now you've got this desk in your room?" she asked.

Chloe took a hard look at the offending homework desk her mum had insisted on buying. There had been little enough floor space before.

"Let's go for it. We'll do the dance we practised. Don't forget, it's step turn, step turn." They lined up together and Chloe started the music with the volume turned well down. The thumping beat needed to be louder, but she didn't want to risk getting into trouble for waking her little brother.

"Is it Ben's bedtime already?" Jess asked. Chloe nodded. Step turn, step turn, step—

"Ow!" Chloe stumbled against the desk and sent her homework flying.

"When I'm famous," she told Jess crossly, "I'm going to have a *huge* bedroom. In fact, I'll probably have one room to sleep in and another just for my clothes and stuff. I certainly won't bother with a desk! I won't copy other people's dances either. Someone will make them up to go with the songs I sing. *And* I'll have proper clothes for my performances," she added, draping a remnant of curtain material over her shoulder before tossing it onto her bed in despair.

"Cool," said Jess. "You can get anything you want when you're famous. I'm going to have a hundred kittens in my dressing room."

"A hundred kittens would be far too many!" said Chloe. She knew Jess only mentioned kittens because her mum wouldn't let her have one of Katie Wilson's. "Imagine all the puddles on the carpet," she added, wrinkling her nose.

"One of my servants could mop them up," Jess giggled.

Chloe sighed, rubbing the bruise on her bum. "Being famous isn't just about being rich, you know,"

she said. "It's not a game, Jess. I know it's fun dreaming about loads of money, and having what we want, but it's more than that! I really want to *be* a pop singer, not just dream about it. Imagine making thousands of people happy when you sing. Wouldn't that be amazing? That's what I want to do, but we'll never make it if you don't take it seriously."

"I *am* taking it seriously!"

Step turn, step turn. There was just room between the desk, the dressing table and Chloe's bed. Chloe nudged Jess and they raised their microphones together for the final line of the song. Jess's voice rang out in the tiny room before she remembered about Ben. Chloe dived for the CD player, but it was too late.

"What on earth are you doing?"

They both started guiltily. "Nothing."

Chloe's mum was standing in the doorway. She looked really cross.

"Well you've disturbed Ben again. How many times have I told you to keep quiet while he gets off to sleep?

You know if he hears your voices he wants to get back out of bed."

"Sorry," they mumbled.

"Have you finished your homework?" Chloe's mum had noticed the fallen school books.

"Not yet."

"I thought that's why you were both up here. Honestly Chloe, if you started your homework as soon as I put Ben to bed you wouldn't keep him awake, would you?"

Chloe shook her head.

"Perhaps I ought to go," Jess said awkwardly.

"Well, maybe that would be a good idea," Chloe's mum agreed. "While Ben's going through this difficult stage it would be better if you came round straight after school instead of after tea."

The girls walked soberly downstairs together. "Sorry about that," Jess whispered. "See you tomorrow." She shimmied down the front path and out of the gate without a care in the world.

Chloe closed the front door and leaned up against it.

It was all right for Jess. She didn't have a little brother who wouldn't go to sleep, or a stupid desk in the way of dancing practice, *and* Jess's mum wasn't always nagging her to do her homework. She wished she were allowed to go to Jess's house more often. It was so hard, thought Chloe, to keep her ambition alive when the rest of her family didn't care about her making it as a singer. And Jess didn't have to keep her voice down all the time.

Chloe dawdled back up the stairs, deep in thought. The memory still burned in her of the birthday party years ago when everyone had laughed at the way she'd sung *Happy Birthday*. Even now, she was certain she hadn't been out of tune, just loud.

Even worse, when she had sung in the choir at primary school, Mrs. Pendle had constantly been at her to pipe down because her voice didn't fit in with the rest of the class. It wasn't fair.

Mum was waiting for her on the landing. "Now," she said. "You'd better clear up this mess and get on with your homework. I don't know what those books are

doing on the floor. You should take more care of them. They're important."

"You didn't have to tell me off in front of Jess," Chloe said angrily, slapping the books back onto her desk. "It was embarrassing."

"Well, I'm sorry, but if you'd been quietly doing your homework there wouldn't have been a problem. Besides, you're at secondary school now. You're growing up. You can't spend all your time with Jess pretending to be a pop singer. I've told you before how important it is to make a good impression at your new school. You don't want the teachers to give up on you."

"Fine!" Chloe closed her bedroom door behind her, resisting the urge to slam it. She slumped onto the chair in front of her new desk and leaned her chin on her hands.

She wouldn't give up. She wouldn't! No matter how difficult Mum made it. One day, she and Jess would be up there on the telly for everyone to see. *Then* her mum wouldn't go on about homework!