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I reading

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Chapter 1

she's just like a real magpie. . .

My mum totally loves shiny things, like silver and gold and jewels and big, fast, shiny cars. Mikey, her business partner, calls her 'Magpie' because she's always on the lookout for things, just like one of those magpie-birds that takes shiny stuff and hoards it in its nest. The only difference is that my mum hoards things in our flat, which means if she doesn't stop soon we'll be facing an emergency situation due to lack of space.

The thing I worry about most is that my mum says she can't stop herself. She is truly addicted. And the worst thing is that often she doesn't even buy things, she just takes them. Anything shiny is just too tempting

for her. Some people might call it 'stealing'; my mum calls it 'borrowing'. It *is* stealing though and, well, that's not exactly a good thing is it? And though me and Mum do some pretty cool stuff, sometimes she can be so embarrassing. Like the other day when we were walking through the market and she saw a fluffy scarf that she wanted for me. She just strolled up to the stall and while she was busy talking to the lady about the weather, she slipped it into her bag. And then what am I supposed to do? I can hardly scream "Thief" and get my mum arrested for shoplifting! So I just stay close and keep my mouth shut, and if people notice we make a run for it, fast.

I also know that she spends money on the internet using other people's credit cards. You might think that's a good thing for me because I have stuff, like three iPods, seven watches, a drawer full of rings, bangles and necklaces, two giant plasma TVs and my own laptop. And I do like getting all that stuff. . . and I love my mum and we're a team, just me and her. But sometimes I wish she was more like a normal mum. I can't tell anyone the truth about the stealing or say anything to her about it because I don't want to upset her, and I'm



afraid that if I do say anything she'll go off on one of her temper tantrums, which means she'll go straight out to the shops again, just to cheer herself up.

Last month we had a row and Mum drank loads of wine. Then she went out and came back with an amazing mega-red sports car that Mikey got hold of. I wanted us to make up, so I squashed down my worries and had fun as Mum and me zoomed about all over the place with the roof down wearing headscarves and big sunglasses like movie stars do. "Living the dream, that's what we're doing, babe," Mum giggled as we raced down the High Street. But a couple of days ago Mum got bored of it, and sold it on to this uber-rich lady while I was at school.

"We've done it, babe, the world's our oyster!" she squealed, as she showed me the hugest mountain of cash I've ever seen. We danced around the living room like crazy things, throwing our money-confetti high up in the air and letting it fall down on us like paper rain.

Right then we knew that the money would change our days. But we didn't know how much it would change our lives.