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Opening extract from

Love, Peace and Chocolate

Written by

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I

hey jess! dying of boredom in french, karl williams is actually asleep on the desk. SNORING. seriously. if i survive, meet u in the music room at lunchtime. txt bak, my moby's switched to silent.
love, peace & chocolate,
kady xxxx

kady, mon amie, my moby wasn't set to silent & now i hav 100 lines to do this

lunchtime, thanks a bunch!
love, peace & chocolate,
jess x

Kady and me have been best friends – well, forever, pretty much. We met at three years old, at toddler group. Mum says Kady nicked my Playdoh, and I retaliated by chucking a bit of soggy flapjack at her. We bonded later, over the finger-paints, and we've never looked back.

We've been through a lot together, Kady and me. We braved playgroup, nursery, primary school. We discovered Bratz dolls, Brownies and ballet, and also nits, chicken-pox and verrucas. (Don't worry; those days are gone!)

Secondary school brought a whole new

bunch of stuff to handle: French verbs, Bunsen burners, equilateral triangles – and also first periods (Kady) and first bras (both of us). We're looking forward to the first love, first boyfriend, first kiss bit too, but things have been kind of slow on this score.

I don't know if we're just unlucky, but there's not a whole lot of choice at Parkway Community School. There isn't a single Year Eight boy who can make my heart beat faster – except for Karl Williams that time he set off a firework right outside Mr Barrow's science class, and that was only because I thought it was a terrorist attack. Maybe it's because we've known these boys since primary, or maybe they're just exceptionally plain, charmless and downright annoying.

'One day,' Kady sighs, peering out of the

window at Karl Williams and his gang, who are playing football with an old tin can in the pouring rain. 'One day, we'll meet a couple of cute, cool lads. Just you wait!'

'Not in this school, we won't.'

We're in the music room. Miss Anderson lets us hang out in here because I'm meant to be practising my flute for her, but there hasn't been a whole lot of practice going on lately. I pick up my flute and run through a couple of scales to keep the guilt at bay, then scrawl another few lines of *I must not leave my mobile phone switched on during lesson time*.

'So,' says Kady. 'Talking of cute, cool lads . . . Who would you rather kiss? Mr Barrow, Karl Williams or . . . a frog?'

'Oh, gross!' I protest. 'Not Mr Barrow –

he's got to be at least sixty, and those nylon shirts he wears . . .'

'Tasteful,' Kady smirks.

'Scary,' I correct her. 'And Karl Williams? No way! Nope, it'd have to be the frog.'

'Even though it's fat and slimy and covered in warts?' Kady demands.

'Even though,' I admit. 'It's the best option of the three, by far. And who knows, if I kiss it, it might turn into a handsome prince!'

'You're a dreamer,' Kady tells me. 'There are no princes any more. There are no cool boys at Parkway, full stop – I think they screen them out and pack them all off to private schools to stop them from distracting us. We could grow old and grey and shrivelled and never be kissed, the way things are going.'

'Rubbish,' I tell her. 'You're so impatient,

Kady! We're twelve years old. That's not exactly old and grey and shrivelled.'

'No – they're the best years of our lives, my mum reckons,' Kady says. 'We've got it all, according to her. Clear skin, skinny hips, shiny hair, endless energy. And what are we doing? Wasting it all on lines and flute practice. That's sad.'

'Well, the lines bit is kind of your fault.'

'I said I was sorry!' she huffs. 'Look, this is serious, Jess! What do we want from life? Love, peace and chocolate. Not much to ask, is it?'

'We can usually manage the chocolate bit,' I say reasonably.

Kady thumps the tabletop. 'It's not enough!' she argues. 'What about peace? No more war, no more hunger, no more maths homework?'

'I don't know if a ban on homework would actually help with world peace,' I say.

'Of course it would,' Kady scoffs. She runs a comb through my hair, twists it into a wispy little bun and pins it by my ear. 'And what about *love*? What about romance? Don't you ever feel that life is passing you by?'

'You have to be patient,' I tell her. 'You can't rush fate!'

'Dream on!' Kady scoffs. 'Fate's just for fairy stories, Jess. There are no princes, only frogs, and fate is another word for do-as-you're-told. Face it, if we sit around here waiting for Prince Charming to show up, we'll still be here when we're ninety.'

'So what are we gonna do instead?' I ask.

'Get out there and grab life with both

hands,' Kady announces. 'I suppose. Some day.'

Kady finishes messing with my hair and shows me the result in a hand mirror. She has pinned up two tiny, twisty little buns on either side of my face. It's cute, if a little weird, like something an elf-queen might wear in one of those *Lord of the Rings* films.

Kady is fab at hairstyles – she's been practising on me since we were six years old, so she should be. She wears her own hair in tight, beaded braids pretty much all of the time, because otherwise it goes fluffy and frizzy. It always looks amazing, though – it complements her smooth, latte-coffee skin just perfectly.

'Like it?' Kady wants to know.

'Love it. Thanks, Kady!'

She grabs up the lined paper and swipes my pen. 'I'll finish these for you,' she says. 'After all, like you said, it was partly my fault too. You practise, OK?'

She leans over the lined paper, scribbling furiously, and I pick up my flute and play.

I love to play the flute – and Kady, for all her joking around, loves to listen. She even put up with me in the days when my playing was more like the screeching you'd get if you stood on a cat's tail, but now, after four years of practice, I can actually hold a tune.

When I play, it's all about breath and concentration and cold, shiny silver for a while – and then all of that falls away and it's just music, clear, cool music, chasing away the rain and the homework, the hassles, the drudgery.

The notes rise up, filling the scuddy old classroom with light, shimmering into the darkest corners, flying like birds up through the ceiling and onwards, right up into the sky.

Then it's over, and I lower my flute and take a breath in, grinning at Kady, who has abandoned the lines, gone all sad-eyed and dreamy.

'Lovely,' she sighs.

And then there's a soft, slow clapping from the back of the room, and a tall, slim boy steps out of the shadows.

'Yeah,' he says. 'That was . . . awesome!'

Kady turns to look, and I can see her eyes open wide, her jaw drop, her cheeks flush softly with pink. Me – I'm just about crimson.

'Didn't mean to embarrass you,' he says.

'I just didn't want to interrupt, y'know? I don't usually like classical music, but that was something else!'

The boy in the shadows is tall and smiley. He's wearing an old black suit jacket covered with band badges, low-slung cords and a skinny black jumper, and on his back is a black guitar case, slung diagonally across his body. As we gawp, he walks lazily across the room, shrugs the guitar case off and leans it against the wall.

'Miss Anderson said I could leave it here till later,' he grins.

The bell rings out then, signalling the end of lunchbreak, and Kady jumps up, smooths her skirt down, finds her voice.

'Um . . . we don't know you, do we?' she says. 'You don't go to Parkway, do you?'

The boy laughs, shaking a mess of choppy, caramel-coloured hair out of his sparkly dark blue eyes. 'Yeah, I go to Parkway,' he says. 'As of three days ago, anyhow! My folks just came down here from Liverpool. I'm still settling in, I guess. I'm in Year Nine.'

'I'm Kady Hamilton and this is Jess Taylor,' Kady says, twisting one long, beaded braid around her finger. 'We're Year Eight. And you are . . .?'

He slips his thumbs through the belt-loops of his skinny cords and tilts his head to one side.

'Jack,' he says, looking right at me. 'I'm Jack Somers.'