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Opening extract from

A Friend in Need

Written by

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For Hattie and Phoebe, great nieces!





Daisy is friendly and gets on with everyone. She's kind and sensible. She's always thinking of how she can help others and loves being a school 'buddy'. She hates it when people fall out and was very upset when her parents split up, though she's got used to it now.

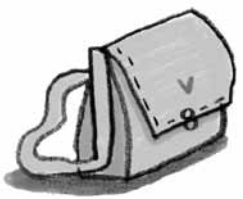


Phoebe is shy and finds it hard to make friends. She enjoys craft which she can do on her own – but it's even better with Daisy. And Daisy shares her love of reading. She likes the peace and quiet of Daisy's house, where they can get on without being disturbed by Phoebe's little brothers, The Smellies.



Erika is entertaining. She's full of energy and very sporty. She means well but sometimes doesn't realise she's hurting people's feelings. She tries very hard to please her parents who expect her to be good at everything, and sometimes that's a strain.

Thursday





Erika's not talking to me.

At school I put a note in her drawer saying, 'What's the matter? PLEASE let's talk.' But she didn't answer. And I've just texted, 'Shall I come round?' But she hasn't texted back. Perhaps she didn't find my note? Actually, I didn't see her go to her drawer before the bell went and she had to rush off to a match or race, or something.

Maybe I'm worrying too much.

But Erika's not talking to Phoebe, either. And Phoebe isn't answering my texts. I know she thinks I'm worrying too much about Erika, but Phoebe doesn't know Erika like I do. They didn't used to get on, but I've sorted that out. We've all been friends for weeks now.

Now it looks as if they've both gone off *me*. So I'm stuck in my bedroom with no one to talk to except Marmalade, and he's fast asleep. Mum's downstairs but she'd just tell me not to worry if I told her. I suppose I could go round Phoebe's, but what if Erika comes here while I'm there?

The reason I'm worried about Erika is that I think she's in some sort of trouble. She's been acting really strangely. But why won't she tell me what it is? I wouldn't tell anyone – well not unless she's in *danger*. I wouldn't even tell Phoebe if Erika didn't want me to. Although that would upset Phoebe if she found out. But I'm really trustworthy and sensible. Everyone says so. That's why I'm a school buddy.

Oh, dear. How am I going to find out what's bugging Erika? I hate it when we're not speaking.



I'm fed up with Daisy going on and on about Erika. It's all she ever talks – or texts – about at the moment. And we're only supposed to use our new mobiles for emergencies.

Erika really hurt my feelings today. I took in my spare Moshi cards to do a swap and she didn't even look at them. She just looked as if she'd been turned into a horrible Glump and went off to practise shooting at goal. That's probably what it's about in fact. When Erika's got a match coming up it's bye-bye to her non-sporty friends till it's all over. She's SO sporty!

Oh no, here's another text from Daisy.

MUST FIND WHATS UP WTH E

Why? It's not a mystery. Erika's good fun except when she's got a race or a match or a tournament. Then she's just BORING. It's train train train.

I'm texting Daisy.

PLEASE CAN WE GET ON WTH OUR PROJECT?



We're designing a set for our next show at Drama Club, *The Thwarting of Baron Bollingrew*. I've got this cardboard box which will make a great medieval castle IF – quick, close door! – I can get it to Daisy's before my little brothers wreck it. That's another thing, Erika's decided not to be in this show. And we really need her because there are fifteen parts and only twelve of us to act them, as well as all the men at arms and poor and needy villagers. Erika would make a great Mike Magpie. I can just see her hopping all over the stage making everyone laugh. Daisy thinks so too, so we're both going to text her and say she's GOT to be in it.

Oh no, more trouble. The Smellies are bawling their heads off. Enter Mum any moment now to blame me. Honestly, nothing's going right at the moment.



Oh, dear. I know I'm upsetting Dais and Phoebe, but what else can I do? I've got to deal with this myself. But if I see Dais and Phoebe I'll blab, I know I will. It will all come pouring out and they'll start treating me like some poor little kid who's fallen over in the playground.

I can hear Daisy now. 'You're being *bullied,* Erika!'

No, Dais, I'm NOT! It's just some stupid person trying to scare me off winning.

AND Daisy would insist we tell a teacher which would make things a trillion zillion times worse. I mean it's most likely someone just joking. They'd laugh their heads off if I made a fuss about it. Me? Bullied? I don't think so. I'm not a wimpy loser and I'm absolutely not scared by a few texts. The thing to do is keep quiet,

play it cool. Then they won't even know if I'm getting the texts.

But I really wish I knew who was sending them. Trouble is the cowardy custard is hiding SENT BY. How do they do that? And how have they got my number? Oh no, here's another one.

YR NOT LIST-NIN R U?

That must be because I won all my heats tonight. I'm fastest in the county! And here's another.

OK. LET U OF THIS TIME
BUT LOOSE 3 SHYRES

Aha! A clue! The creep can't spell. AND they want to win the Three Counties' Cross Country even more than I do. But, no, that's not a clue. Everyone wants to win. I mean, why run if you don't? Well, whoever the creep is they don't know me if they think a few texts can scare me off! I'm going for a run right now.

'Come on, Rolly!'



But better text Daisy first. Super-sensitive Dais has sensed something's wrong so I'll just say everything's hunky dory.

NOTHING UP JUST FOCUSSED ON RACE. C U IN MORNING.

'Come on, Rolly. Wake up. We're in training!'

