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Opening extract from

Suzy P and the Trouble with Three

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For Ade and for Oliver,
who are made of awesome.

CHAPTER ONE

Oh thank you, thank you, *thank you*.

They're finally here. They're finally, finally here!

After weeks of waiting, school is done. Bring on the summer holidays, people!

It's going to be awesome. Six weeks of freedom. Six weeks of nothing to do but hang out with my bezzies.

No homework.

No snide comments from evil Jade Taylor and her equally evil sidekick Kara Walker.

There'll be lie-ins.

There'll be endless sun.

We'll busy ourselves making memories that last forever, and all that jazz.

It's going to be bliss.

Although, we *may* need to work on the blissful thing…

Because, instead of frolicking and showing off my bikini bod at the beach, playfully swatting an inflatable beach ball, I'm sitting in Tastee Burga, avoiding the rain.

Yarg. I *hate* this place.

Still, at least I'm hanging out with my fave peeps in the whole wide world – my best friend Millie, my boyfriend Danny, and Jamie, boyfriend of Millie and best friend of Danny. I just wish we'd gone to Bojangles, my favourite local café, for our end of term celebration, but Millie and I were outshouted by the boys and their noisy desire for meat.

But then, I wish for a whole heap of things. It doesn't mean any of them actually come true.

Like, I wish I was sophisticated and elegant, and not a walking disaster area who causes mayhem wherever she goes. Today alone, I've crushed a Year Seven after tripping down the stairs, been smacked in the chest by a netball resulting in still-sore boobage, and swallowed a midge while reading aloud in English, nearly choking to death.

I wish I had a better surname. Puttock? I mean, *really*? It's horrendous. *And* it rhymes with a body part nobody wants to be associated with.

I wish my hair was smooth and sleek, not coarse and untameable with a mind of its own. I also wish a product existed that could turn said coarse, untameable hair into

beautiful ringlets. We're having the world's soggiest summer, and I'm permanently frizzy.

I wish my big sister, Amber, wasn't getting madder by the day. She's pregnant, and found out at her twelve-week scan it's twins. Now her levels of insanity seem to be increasing with her stomach size. I also wish her pregnancy insomnia would go away, and she'd stop wanting sisterly chats with me about random nonsense at 6 a.m. She and her husband Mark were supposed to be moving into their own place but with the babies on the way they can't afford it, so there's no end to the crack-of-dawn discussions in sight.

I wish my little sister, Harry, wasn't so flipping annoying. Having spent the last year being obsessed with practical jokes, she's now also completely fixated with magic. Blame Harry Potter. Her latest spell attempt is one to try to get me to disappear.

I wish Mum hadn't spent all of the family savings on Amber's wedding earlier this year, giving Dad a total nervous breakdown once he saw the final bill. The prompt implementation of the Puttock Emergency Budget has resulted in value-beans-on-value-toast for tea three times a week since. *And* we're not going away on holiday this year because we're so broke.

I wish I hadn't lost my school blazer, because Mum's going to throw the world's biggest wobbler when she finds out – it's the third one this year. Plus, the constant rain of this so-called summer means I keep getting wet without it, hence I'm sitting here in a soggy shirt.

I wish Millie would cheer up, because usually she's super fun and excitable, but right now she's as miserable as the weather. I haven't seen her eat a single jelly baby all day, and she's usually mainlining the things, so *something's* definitely going on.

I wish—

"Suzy!" Danny says, shaking my arm. "Come on, answer already. How much would it take for you to eat a moth? Twenty thousand quid?"

"Would you stop it? Pack it in, you're putting me off my fries," I say. Ever since Danny found out how much I loathe moths in a recent game of Truth or Dare, he's gone on and on about it.

The thought of having one in my mouth, that hairy body on my tongue, oh God, it's making me want to vom. I couldn't do it.

Even for stacks of cash.

Lately, Danny and Jamie have become obsessed with giving each other more and more outrageous challenges. Turns out, Danny would eat a tarantula for eighty thousand

pounds, while Jamie, the human dustbin, would need half a million. I was surprised, I've seen him eat some terrifyingly out-of-date-stuff before.

"Come on, surely you'd eat a tiny little moth for twenty thousand," Danny says. "*Twenty thousand pounds*. You'd hardly even notice it going down. One gulp and it's gone."

I shake my head. "Nuh-uh."

"Fifty thousand?" Jamie offers, his eyebrows waggling temptingly under his floppy dark fringe.

I think about the money. Oh, so much money… I could buy whatever I wanted. Get tickets to see The Drifting. Sort out my hair. Treat my family to an amazing holiday.

But the thought of a moth in my mouth… I put down my chip and grimace.

"Wow," Jamie says, shovelling in another spoonful of ice cream. "The stakes are getting high. Let's try one hundred thousand…"

"I don't want to play this stupid game," I say.

"Not for a hundred K? Then how much?" Danny asks.

"Shut up," I say.

"How much? How much?" Danny and Jamie chant, slapping their hands against the table.

"Would you two stop?" I say, although I'm laughing

now. "I guess… maybe a million?"

"A million?" chorus Danny and Jamie. "*Seriously?*"

"I can't believe you wouldn't do it for less," Danny says. "A harmless little moth. It'd be nothing."

"Yeah, well, that's how much it would take," I say. "Now let me eat in peace."

"Mills, you're up," Jamie says. But Millie's not paying attention. She's staring out of the window, twiddling the turquoise streak in her blonde bob as she watches people meandering through the shopping centre.

"Millie?" he says again.

"Hmm?" Millie says.

"Ready for your dilemma?"

"I'm not playing," Millie says.

"Not an option," Danny tells her. "Right…" He thinks for a moment. "How much to give a full body massage to a skunk? No gloves."

"Good one," Jamie says.

"I told you, I'm not playing," Millie says.

"All right, grumpy. Can I have that burger if you're not eating it?" Jamie asks, pointing to her untouched food.

"Sure," Millie replies, pushing it across the table.

"Are you okay?" I ask.

"Yup," Millie says.

"Really?"

"Yes, really," Millie says, standing up. "I'm going to the loo. Back in a minute."

"What's up with her?" I ask, watching her walk towards the toilets.

"She said she was fine," Jamie says.

"I'm not so sure," I say. "I'll go and talk to her."

"If she says she's fine, she's fine," Jamie calls.

Pfff. Shows how much boys know.

I wait for Millie by the sinks. Eventually, she flushes and emerges. Her eyes look all puffy.

"Have you been crying?" I ask.

"I've got something in my eye," Millie says, splashing cold water onto her face.

"In both your eyes?" I say.

"Weird, huh?" Millie says. "Hey, I want to go and see if Pink Panda have got the top I saw on their website. I'm going to celebrate summer by treating myself. You coming with, or staying here?"

"I'll come," I say, even though I'm skint.

"Great," Millie says, grinning as she leans over to give me a big hug. "Let's go!"

Maybe I was wrong about her. After all, Millie doesn't really get upset. She's always super perky and upbeat. Admittedly, most of it's sugar-fuelled, but she's always been that way, the whole time I've been her best friend.

Which is forever.

"We're going shopping," Millie announces when we return to the boys, who immediately look dismayed.

"Nooooo," moans Jamie.

"I'm not going to any clothes shops," Danny says. "Besides, there's a documentary on tonight about the making of the first *Star Wars* trilogy. I'm getting the next bus back."

My boyfriend is cute, with amazing blue eyes, short blondey-brown hair and kissable lips that curve into the warmest, happiest smile. My boyfriend is sweet and funny, and really kind. I love him to pieces. But – and this is a big but – he is way, way too obsessed with *Star Wars* for my liking.

"I'll come with you, mate," Jamie says. He gives Millie a kiss as Danny leans over and kisses me goodbye too.

"Mmm, fruity," he says, sniffing enthusiastically at my neck.

"Gerroff," I push him away, laughing. "It's a perfume Amber gave me. She's not wearing any while she's pregnant."

"How come?" Millie says.

"In case the babies don't like the smell or something."

"You what?" says Danny. "How can they smell anything?"

"I know. Insane," I say. "I'll ring you later."

"Only after the documentary's finished," Danny

instructs. "No calls will be answered until ten."

I roll my eyes as I agree, because I know he's deadly serious.

Millie's still kind of quiet as we're walking through the shopping centre.

"Does Danny talk to you much about when his parents were getting divorced?" Millie suddenly asks, taking me by surprise.

"Um... not really," I say. "It was a couple of years ago now, I think he's kind of over it."

"Was he upset?"

"Uh... yeah. I guess. You would be, wouldn't you, if your parents split up? But I think the fact they've stayed friends helps, even though his mum moved away. It's not like they're slagging each other all the time or anything. Why?"

"No reason," Millie says, hurriedly. "Just, you know, wondering. Oooh, look at him," she says, grabbing my arm and pointing excitedly. Up ahead there's a seriously cute lad giving out flyers.

"Check out those cheekbones," Millie says dreamily. "And that mouth, mmm... Couldn't you imagine kissing it?"

I shake my head and laugh. Millie's such a minx. She's a total flirt, but way too into Jamie to do anything about

any of her crushes. She just enjoys looking. And Jamie knows exactly what she's like. It doesn't seem to bother him. Whereas me… well, I'm more wary about eyeing up other boys these days, after what happened earlier this year with Zach, a guy from our school. I briefly broke up with Danny to be with Zach, but it was the biggest mistake of my life.

I shudder. I was such an idiot to think he was better than Danny. I hate being reminded how close I came to throwing everything away.

"Come on, you," I say, steering Millie towards Pink Panda. They don't really sell the kind of clothes I'm into – I'm not brave enough to wear half their stuff – but Millie loves it. She's got fantastic dress sense, and a real knack for putting crazy, bright items of clothing together. They'd look ridiculous on most people (me included), but on her they look great. I think it's partly about the accessories she uses. She's very good at accessorising, is Millie. It's almost an art form.

Millie lets go of my arm and darts through Pink Panda's doors, grabbing items – including the coveted top – like she's doing a trolley dash, squealing with joy as she goes. I follow behind more slowly. I've got less than a tenner left which needs to last me for the rest of the week *and* pay for my bus home. If I do find something I like, it'll have to be in the sale, or being given away for free.

Flicking through the clothes on the sale rail, I can see a few tops that are quite pretty, but most importantly, cheap, although probably still out of my budget. I grab a couple, then come across a dress that's the ugliest thing I've ever seen in my life. It's a rainbow tartan minidress, with frills and ruffles around the sleeves and hemline.

Delightedly, I pick it out to show to Millie.

I catch up with her queuing by the changing rooms. "Check this out," I snigger, holding up the dress.

Millie's eyes widen. "Oh. My. God. That's outrageous. You have to try it on."

"Hah. No chance," I say.

"Please," Millie says.

"No way, it's disgusting! And I don't wear dresses. Ever since that gross thing Amber made me wear as bridesmaid, I've vowed never, ever again. Swore an oath and everything."

"Please," Millie begs, holding her hands together in prayer position. "Please, please, pretty please with a cherry on the top. It'll be hilarious. I'd laugh for a week."

"Oh, all right," I relent. It *would* be pretty funny to see what I look like. I check the label and see that it's too small for me, so chances are I'm not going to fit more than a toe inside anyway.

"How many items?" a bored assistant asks. She leads us, and two other girls who arrived in front, to the cubicles at the end of the corridor. The girls are tall and slim in their private school uniforms, which they're wearing with heels. I'm not allowed to wear heels as Mum says my feet haven't finished growing yet, and if I wear heels regularly I'll be wheelchair-bound by my twenties, or something. Apparently I'll thank her for it one day.

I'm not convinced.

"They're our age, can you believe it?" Millie whispers, tilting her head towards the girls. "I heard them talking before you came over. They look loads older, right?"

The pair have flawless, perfectly made-up faces and matching hairstyles: blonde and long with toffee highlights and not a strand out of place. They're also carrying what look suspiciously like Mulberry handbags. *Mulberry!*

The only reason I know what a Mulberry bag looks like is because Amber has shoved every picture she's ever seen of one in my face. She's desperate for the kind her celebrity icon, Conni G, has. But they're crazy expensive. Like, hundreds of pounds. Thousands, sometimes.

I think it's fair to say if I had a Mulberry, chances are I'd trash it in seconds by squishing banana in it, or spilling lemonade over it, but still. Imagine being the kind

of girl with a bag like that. Life would be different if I was a Mulberry girl, all rich and elegant.

I sigh enviously.

"Make sure you show me what that dress looks like," Millie says, swishing the curtain behind her. "No chickening out."

I wriggle out of my clothes and attempt to squeeze into the dress, pulling the zip up as far as I can. It only gets halfway up my side. I'm not exactly big, but the dress is so tight there are little rolls of fat appearing all over the place. Plus it's so short you can practically see my knickers, and so tight I can only walk in teeny-tiny Geisha girl steps.

My blotchy corned-beef skin teamed with forgotten-to-shave pits don't exactly help the overall look, either.

"I'm not coming out, you're going to have to come in," I call to Millie. There's no way I'm risking anyone seeing me.

Millie sticks in her head and cracks up. "That is too horrendous," she says, fumbling for her phone. "Let me take a photo for the boys…"

"Er, no flipping way," I say, clasping my trousers in front of me with one hand to cover up as much of my body as I can, while swatting Millie away with the other.

"You've seen it now, I'm taking it off," I say, but when I pull at the zip nothing happens.

I tug again.

And again.

Tug. Tug. Tug.

Nothing.

Oh God. I'm completely and utterly stuck!

Millie's laughing so hard there are tears streaming down her cheeks.

"This isn't funny," I say, although I'm giggling too.

Millie's still doing her utmost to nab a photo when her phone rings. "Hi, Soph," she answers hesitantly, greeting her older sister. "Uh huh, uh huh, oh no, really?" Millie's tone is serious. I can make out Sophie's voice, high and stressed, although I can't hear exactly what she's saying. After a couple of minutes, Millie says, "I'll be home as soon as I can," and hangs up.

"Everything okay?" I ask.

"Um, yeah, fine. I've got to go. Sorry."

"You can't, I need your help to get the dress off," I call, as Millie rushes away. She's not even stopping to buy the top she wanted so much.

"Millliieee," I howl in despair. "You can't just leave me here."

"Sorry," Millie calls over her shoulder.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the store will be closing in five minutes. Please take your purchases to the till," a voice announces over the intercom.

This can't be happening.

What am I supposed to do now?