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opening extract from

Mates, Dates and Sizzling Summers

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Chapter 1

Post-Party

'I tell you, that boy was smitten,' said Izzie as she kicked her shoes off and flopped down on my bed. 'S.M.I.T. Smitten.'

I stood in front of the mirror that hung on the back of my bedroom door and frowned at my reflection. 'Nah. He couldn't be. I mean, look at me. Pale face, spot threatening to erupt on my forehead, bags under my eyes . . . No, this is not a look that smits, smites, or whatever the word is. And a boy like Ollie Axford would never fancy me. Not if he knew me properly. No, it was that top you made me wear, Lucy – I felt like I was walking about in my underwear! Every boy in the place was staring at me . . . or rather at my chest.'

Nesta laughed as she reached into her jeans' pocket to pull out some lip-gloss. 'Not to mention all the dads,' she said as she sprawled next to Izzie and began to apply the strawberry-scented lip-gloss.

'It was soooo embarrassing,' I said. 'Never again.'

Lucy took a pillow off the bed and made herself comfortable on the floor next to my dog, Mojo. 'You looked fab,' she said as she tickled Mojo's ears. 'It showed off your shape, that's all. You should wear things like that more often instead of those tracksuits that you hide away in.'

'I don't hide away in them. They're comfortable.'

Nesta pulled a face and put her gloss away. 'And dead boring. You always amaze me, TJ. You've got gorgeous brown eyes, a mouth most actresses would kill for and great legs. You can look five-star if you want – like you did last night with your hair loose down your back and a bit of make-up on – but most of the time, your hair's scraped back and you slob around in tracksuits like that shapeless grey *thing* you're wearing today.'

'They're cosy and easy to wear,' I retailiated.

'They're passionkillers,' she said. 'If you got it, flaunt it, I say. And you got it, girl.'

You're the ones who've got it, girls, I thought as I looked at the three of them lounging around my room and looking like an ad in a teen mag. Nesta's tall and skinny with long black hair, coffee-coloured skin and fab, high cheek bones; even today when she's only wearing jeans and a T-shirt she still looks stunning. Lucy and Izzie are attractive too but in different ways. Lucy is the smallest of the four of us with short blond hair and Izzie is tall with chestnut-coloured hair, cut in layers down to her shoulders and she's got a gorgeous curvy figure. Boys always look at them wherever we go and I think they're the best-looking bunch at our school. I'm still amazed that they adopted me into their group last year after my best mate, Hannah, went off to live in South Africa.

Izzie pushed her tummy out over her jeans. 'Yeah. If I had a body like yours, TJ, I think I *would* walk around in my underwear all day with a sign in front saying, *Look at me, I look so fab, look at my flat stomach, look at my legs* . . . la la lahhh . . .'

'You're mad, Izzie Foster,' I said. 'But thank God Mum and Dad weren't there last night. Dad would have had a heart attack!'

It was Sunday, the day after the charity ball that we'd been planning for weeks – all through April – and the girls were round at my house for the post-party gossip.

'It feels strange that it's over after all the work that we've put in,' said Izzie, sighing. 'Bit of an anticlimax. All those weeks of putting up posters, selling tickets, organising the music, the fashion show, trying not to panic when it looked like no one was going to show up . . .'

'Worth it in the end though, hey?' I asked. 'I still can hardly believe that we not only met our fundraising target but surpassed it.'

It had been a great night. Nesta had managed to talk a top model called Star Axford into taking part in the fashion show. Her dad is Zac Axford (the famous rock and roller) and, to everyone's amazement, *he'd* turned up to the show, along with his son Ollie. I noticed Ollie the moment he walked in (tall, dark and buff) and he noticed me (or rather my boobs). We both did a double take and then laughed. After the fashion show he'd asked me to dance, and when he left he'd taken my number.

Lucy is our fashion expert and, as I hadn't found a special outfit, she had dressed me for the occasion. I'd been complaining that I had no waist to speak of so she had risen to the challenge and made me a special corset top designed to give

an hourglass figure. It was low at the front and laced up tight at the back and yes, it did give me a waist, but it also gave me the most enormous cleavage. My eyes almost popped out of my head (and my boobs out of the top!) when I saw myself in the mirror at the hall where we got changed.

'The effect of cleavage on boys is funny,' said Nesta. 'Like if you show the tiniest bit, they can't help but stare. It's like an eyeball magnet.'

'The tiniest bit is all you get in my case,' said Lucy. 'And actually, you're right. Boys even stare at *my* chest these days.'

'But seriously,' I said, 'I reckon that's the last we've seen of Ollie Axford.'

'I wouldn't be so sure,' said Nesta. 'I saw the way he looked at you. I bet he calls and asks you out.'

'Nah. He was just passing through,' I said. 'And anyway, he looks like a player. You know the type. Too much of a naughty twinkle in his eye to be trusted. And I bet he likes fun girls. He'd soon get bored with me when he realised how straight and sensible I am.'

'You're not straight and sensible,' said Nesta, 'least not all the time.'

'I am,' I said. 'I'm boring.'

'I used to think that you were,' Nesta started, then Lucy thumped her. '*Ow!* Well, I did! Before we hung out, I used to think you were *really* boring, but you're just one of these people who's quiet in the beginning and it takes a while to get to know. Then when you do, you realise they are not boring in the slightest.'

'Steve liked you when he got to know you,' said Lucy. 'Still does I reckon.'

'No. He hardly speaks to me when I see him,' I said.

'Doesn't mean he doesn't still like you,' said Lucy. 'He keeps his feelings hidden.'

I sighed and joined Nesta and Izzie on the bed. 'Boys are so difficult,' I said. 'My whole love life so far has been a disaster.'

It had, too. My first date was with a boy called Scott who was full of himself and tasted of onions when he kissed me. So much for my first snog. *Blargh*. One to remember? I don't think so.

My second boyfriend was Steve. Great friend more than a great passion. We went out for a short while when I was in Year Nine and I felt safe with him. I could be myself and talk to him easily about anything. (With some boys, I go stupid and start talking alien-speak – that's if I get any words out at all.) I hope that we can be friends again one day as I miss our long chats.

After him was Luke . . . not exactly a boyfriend as he was actually seeing Nesta at the time I met him. I fell for him big time – thought he was my soulmate and that he felt the same. He told me that it was over between him and Nesta so I finished with Steve, and then I found out that Luke was lying and I got majorly confused about how I felt about him. When I was with him, I felt like all the clichés in love songs came true and the world was a happier place. Not that I was happier, though. No. He totally did my head in, but I haven't felt what I felt with him since. Just a glance from him and I used to feel like I was a marshmallow melting. As a kisser, he rated eleven out of ten. Even thinking about kissing him still makes my toes curl up. There was something really special there, but . . . it was a mess. Such a mess. I couldn't trust him and I almost lost Nesta as a friend. I still feel sad that things didn't work out differently.

So, disastrous love life? Yes, I'd say so.

And now Ollie Axford. Very cute and he looks bright, like he's got a brain. But would he be another heartbreaker? I don't think I could bear to go through what I went through with Luke again.

'Not all boys are difficult,' said Nesta, picking up on my thoughts. 'They're not all like Luke.'

Lucy squeezed Nesta's foot. 'Nesta's in lu-hurve.'

Nesta smiled. 'It's true. I am. William Lewis, I looooooove yooooooou. It's amazing.'

'William,' said Izzie, thoughtfully. 'Do you realise that if you married him, and he took your surname, then he'd be William Williams?'

'Yes, but I'm not going to marry him. And even if I did, why would he take my surname?'

Lucy rolled her eyes. 'I can't believe that you're talking about marriage when you've only just started going out with him. And you're only fifteen.'

'Sixteen in August,' said Nesta. 'But I agree. I want to have had lots of boyfriends before I finally settle down, and that's if I ever do. I might just go from one boy to another, gathering experience, and then I'll write my memoirs.'

'Memoirs of a slu-urt,' said Lucy, teasing.

Nesta threw a pillow at her. 'You're the slut – stringing my poor brother along the way you do . . .'

We all laughed. Lucy had an ongoing off-on relationship with Tony, Nesta's brother, but we all knew that it wasn't a case of Lucy stringing him along. She really liked him. And he really liked her. He'll be off to university in September though, so depending on

which one he gets into, they might not see much of each other because of the distance – which explains why Lucy doesn't want to get too involved. Bit too late for that though, if you ask me. You only have to see them together to see how besotted they both are.

'What about you, Izzie?' said Lucy. 'See anyone you fancied last night?'

'Zac Axford,' said Izzie wistfully. 'I love that jaded-rock-star look.'

'That's because he is a jaded rock star,' said Nesta. 'He must be in his forties at least.'

'And married,' I pointed out.

'A girl can dream, can't she?' said Izzie. 'But apart from him, nope. With my luck with boys lately, anyone would think that I'm destined to be an old maid.'

Lucy leaned back, took Izzie's hand and looked at her palm. 'I see many boys. Many lovers. In fact, you are ze slut around here and although you try to keep quiet about the fact, we all know it and recommend that you behave yourself. In fact, you should be locked up until you are thirty-five.'

Izzie pulled her hand away. 'Pff. Leave the fortune-telling to me, O mystically challenged one.'

Usually it's Izzie who does all the fortune-telling stuff. She has Tarot cards, crystals and often does our horoscopes for the coming months. Sometimes she even tries out simple spells.

'Let's forget boys for a while,' I said. 'We're here for a purpose. At last, at *laaaaaaast*, Mum has said that I can join the new century and redecorate my room. Don't think Dad's too keen, but then he is stuck in the dark ages.'

'Is he here?' asked Nesta.

I shook my head. 'No, thank God,' I said. 'So we can make as much noise as we like without old misery appearing.'

The girls have been wary of my father ever since he told us off for having a pillow fight the first time they came over. They call him Scary Dad as he can be really intimidating when he wants to be.

'Don't be mean,' said Lucy. 'He's your dad. He can't be that bad.'

'You don't have to live with him,' I said. 'So. Room. What do you think?'

Nesta leaped up from the bed, stepped over Mojo who had fallen asleep on the floor and fetched a carrier bag of things that she'd brought with her.

'Here. Mum gave us loads of mags to look at,' she said as she spread copies of interior design magazines on the bed.

'And I brought my feng shui book,' said Izzie. 'So that the room has the right feel in the end, as well as looking good.'

'Any ideas so far, TJ?' asked Lucy.

'Anything will be an improvement on this,' I said, as I looked around. My room is dull with a capital D. Ancient leafy wallpaper on the walls and a faded cream candlewick bedspread on the bed. When I first became mates with Lucy, Nesta and Izzie and saw their fab bedrooms, I was embarrassed to let them see how old-fashioned our house is. And not just the house, but my parents too. They're a lot older than most people's. In fact, when Nesta first saw them, they were out in the garden and she thought that they were my grandparents. Dad is almost in his seventies and Mum's just turned sixty. I call them the wrinklies. I think it was a shock when Mum realised that she was having me. I think they thought they'd had their family with Marie

(who's twenty-seven) and Paul (who's twenty-three), and they had a merry old middle-age to look forward to. Then, surprise! Along I came. What they were doing having sex at their age heaven knows. I don't like to think about it, but they clearly did. And they should have known better than to have an unexpected baby, seeing as both of them are doctors. Dad's a hospital consultant and Mum is a GP. It just goes to show that getting pregnant unexpectedly can happen to anyone, and at any age.

Anyway, neither of them have ever been bothered by décor or having the latest sofa or TV. As long as it all works, Mum always says. Both of them have only just come to terms with e-mail and neither will have a mobile phone. Mum likes to garden in her spare time and Dad likes to read or play golf. So they're not Mr and Mrs Groovacious. Unlike Nesta's parents, for instance. They're both so good-looking and cool. Her dad makes films and TV dramas. Her mum is a newsreader on cable. Lucy's dad runs the health shop in Muswell Hill, but he also plays jazz and teaches the guitar. And her mum is great. She's a counsellor and looks like a children's TV presenter – wearing bright colours that don't quite match. Izzie's parents are straighter. Her mum is an accountant in the City and so is her stepdad. Her real dad is more of a wild card, though – he lectures in English at the university in town and is a great laugh. I like him a lot. We have long conversations about books and he often sends me something to read via Izzie.

'I want colour,' I said and got up to find a book from my desk in the corner. 'This place is soooo bland. I got this book on the Far East out of the library. I love the colours they use over there. Reds, oranges, ochres . . . This side of the house doesn't get

much sun so I thought those colours would work better than blues or greens.'

'You could do the room black and white to match Mojo,' said Nesta as Mojo snored in his sleep. 'It's very in to decorate a room to match your pet.'

'Says who?' asked Lucy. 'Some mad journalist who's having a laugh? No. You're right, TJ. Warm colours would be best in here. Make it look cosy. And we could go to Camden Lock and get you an Indian bedspread. Loads of stalls there are selling Eastern stuff at the moment.'

'Yeah,' said Izzie. 'And lanterns. Maybe a little statue of Buddha or the goddess Kali. You could make it look really exotic in here.'

'It's a bedroom, not a temple,' said Nesta. 'She wants some nice cushions, some girlie nick-nacks . . .'

'And some gorgeous fabric at the windows,' said Lucy. 'I used sari material in my room. That would work in here, too. If you go down to Brick Lane they have the most sumptuous colours there: reds threaded with gold, purple with silver edgings. It's going to look great in here.'

'Hey, I haven't got that much money,' I said. 'Mum and Dad don't really believe in spending more than is necessary.'

'Don't worry,' said Lucy. 'There are always ways round it. Markets, ends of rolls, shopping at sale times. We'll make it work within your budget.'

'Which way is west?' asked Izzie, as she got up and pulled a book out of her bag and started flicking through the pages.

I pointed out of the left windowpane. 'That, way, I guess – the sun goes down over there, over the lime trees at the bottom of

the garden. How does this feng shui thing work?'

'There are different areas representing different aspects of your life in each room of a property,' Izzie explained. 'An area for career, health, creativity, wealth, relationships and so on. You need a compass and a feng shui book to work out where they fall in each room as it depends on whether a room faces north, south, east or west. And the effect of that can make an area either positive or negative.'

It sounded incredibly complicated to me. I didn't understand a word of it, but didn't like to say as Izzie is so enthusiastic about these sorts of things. 'Er . . . OK. And then what?' I asked.

'Well, for instance, if you have a wealth area in a negative zone where you keep all your savings, accounts, etc. you'd probably find that they didn't do too well. But if you moved them to another room where the wealth area was in a positive space, then they'd probably multiply.'

'Hmm, cool,' I said. 'So what about this room? What's where?'

Izzie consulted her book again. 'Which way does it face again?'

'North,' I said. 'That's why it doesn't get as much light as the front rooms.'

'OK. Good,' said Izzie, flicking the pages and looking around the room. 'Your bed's in a positive creativity place so that's good. You probably have some great ideas when you're falling asleep, yeah?'

I nodded.

And then Izzie let out a soft groan. 'Ohmigod,' she said, as she pointed under my desk. 'Is that where you always keep your bin?'

I nodded again.

'Move it immediately,' she said. 'It's in the relationship area of your life.'

'So why would having the bin there be a problem?'

'It's in a negative zone, so it's like you're putting all your rubbish into your relationships or all your relationships turn to rubbish. It's no wonder things went so weird with Luke. I should have come over and done this for you ages ago! And I would never write any letters to boys you like or take calls from over here,' she said, going to my desk. She began to pull on the desk until it had moved a few feet. 'Here. If we move it over here by the window it will be in a positive career area, plus you'll be able to see outside when you work.'

I picked up the bin. 'And where shall I put this?'

Izzie pointed under the desk. 'You can put that in the career area as well,' she said. 'Just keep the relationship area empty if you can, and don't put a mirror there as it will reflect the negativity.' Izzie looked pleased with herself. 'I think you might find that your relationships take a turn for the better now we've done that.'

Yeah right, I thought. I didn't really believe it myself but I knew that Izzie did, and I didn't want to hurt her feelings.

About two seconds later, the phone rang.

A moment later, Mum called up the stairs. 'TJ, it's for you. Pick up your extension.'

I picked up the phone.

'Hi,' said a male voice. 'Is that TJ Watts?'

'Speaking.'

'Ollie Axford here.'

Handy Hints for Decorating Your Bedroom

TJ: Do your research: get books and magazines on interior design to give you ideas and colour schemes. Try out paint sample pots on the wall to see how the colour looks at different times of the day, and in natural and artificial light.

Nesta: Budget. Work out how much you have to spend and save some money for one super duper eye-catching piece, like a jewelled mirror or fab velvet cushion.

Izzie: Rule number one in feng shui is clear out the clutter, so get rid of old books, clothes and magazines in order to make way for new ones! Don't forget to make sure that your room smells wonderful. Scented candles and sprays can be used for this. Orange blossom is my current fave.

Lucy: Think carefully about your colour scheme, remembering that light colours can open up a room and make it look more airy, whereas dark colours can close it in and make it look smaller but cosier. Gorgeous fabrics can be draped at windows or made into cushions for that finishing touch.

Colour Ideas

Cool Colours: blue and green.

Warm Colours: red, orange and yellow.

Minimal: white, or shades of white.

Bright: vivid pink, lime, yellow, orange and turquoise.

Fairy Tale: pastel colours, like pink, pale blue, lilac, lavender and turquoise.

Romantic: shades of pink and red.

Exotic: spice colours, such as shades of red, all shades of yellow, honey gold and orange.

Stark: black and white.