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Opening extract from

You Don't Know Me

Written by

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'In the future, everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes.'
Andy Warhol

Fifteen Minutes: Part 1

It's funny how fifteen minutes can change your life.

Sometimes people ask me: would you do it again, knowing what happened? I've thought about it a lot and I suppose the answer is yes, despite everything. Fifteen minutes can be golden. They're all you need to make something beautiful, or save someone from disaster. They can also be black. Either way, fifteen minutes is all it takes to find out who you really are.

*

We were in Rose's bedroom, at the end of the summer holiday. I was sitting on her window seat, watching a combine harvester in the fields outside and idly scrolling through celebrity news websites on the phone my dad had just given me. School was about to start: GCSE year, where everything really matters and teachers keep asking you what you want to do with your life. These were our last few minutes of peace. Well, relative peace, anyway. As peaceful as you can get when one girl – Rose – was making up a mournful tune on the guitar, another girl – Jodie – was moaning about her ex-boyfriend and a third one – Nell – was trying to calm her down.

'He's evil and I hate him with a passion,' Jodie announced, slumping against the wall next to me with an angry scowl.

'Well, not *evil* exactly,' Nell pointed out. Nell is calm yin to Jodie's ranty yang. Together they make a normal girl. 'I mean, he only changed his status on Interface.'

'In *public*!' Jodie complained. 'Without *consulting* me! Just because I was going to France. He said he wasn't sure he could maintain a long-distance relationship. It was TWO WEEKS. Kyle Stanley is a scumbag and that's all there is to it.'

It was our first time back together after weeks away. I'd been visiting my dad in America, and Nell and Jodie had only recently come back from family trips. Rose had been stuck at home all the time, helping on her grandparents' farm. She was still quiet and gloomy, making up sad songs on her guitar.

I looked across to where she sat on her bed with the guitar, and caught her eye. We shared a private smile about Jodie's ranting. Rose changed her tune from the sombre,

folky melody she'd been working on to something Spanish and angsty. It involved lots of fast strumming and dramatic crescendos. You could imagine a Latin singer wailing her distress. Jodie pouted at her.

'Shut up, Rose. I'm not *that* bad.'

Rose merely raised an eyebrow at her and smiled.

'You need something to take your mind off him,' Nell said. She was on the floor, sorting out the pile of junk that had accumulated at the bottom of Rose's wardrobe. 'You can't let a boy like that get to you. Oh look! Wow! Rose, d'you remember these?'

She pulled out a pair of scratched yellow plastic sunglasses with frames in the shape of flowers. Rose has very eclectic dress sense, which means it comes from a variety of sources. 'Eclectic' – a Rose word. She collects them, like I'd started collecting apps for my new phone.

'Oh, I wondered where those had got to,' Rose said, looking up for a moment.

Nell took off her smart red specs and replaced them with the yellow flowers. 'Where did you get them?'

'Can't remember,' Rose said absently, looking back at her guitar. 'I think it was the Bigelow Festival.'

Luckily nobody was watching me at that point, so nobody saw the sudden colour in my cheeks.

Nell went over to the mirror to admire herself. She looked great in the glasses, even though they were probably designed for ten-year-olds. Nell has a small, pretty face and wavy blonde hair that looks good with anything. Peering closely, because she's practically blind without her glasses, she grinned.

'You can't be unhappy in these,' she announced.

Then she started to sing a little tune:

'I put my sunglasses on
My yellow sunglasses on'

That's how it started. I think I came up with the next lines.

'And I think of you
And all the things you do
And it doesn't matter any more because . . .'

Nell laughed and joined in:

'I've got my sunglasses on.'

Rose strummed a new tune on the guitar to go with them. It was quite different this time: fun, silly and catchy. Not angsty at all. And not like that folky, moody number she'd been working on earlier, which had been starting to worry me.

We liked the lines, so we sang them again, and Jodie even added a little harmony. It was something we often did when we were all together. We'd been doing it so long we even had a band name. In fact, several. We called ourselves the Powerpuff Girls. Or the Cheerios (Jodie's favourite breakfast food), or the Manic Pixie Dream Girls (Rose's idea), or the Xtremes, but only if Rose wasn't around – she's a stickler for spelling. Jodie would choose the music. Nell was our lead singer. Rose was makeup and instrumentals. I was wardrobe and catering.

It had been like that since Jodie, Nell and I were in primary school together. Rose joined us later, when she arrived in my class at St Christopher's. We'd get together

. . . we'd sing. We didn't normally write our own stuff, though: we were more of a cover band. But that day Rose had her guitar out and Nell looked really funny in those glasses, and the words and music just seemed to flow. They weren't Shakespeare, I admit, but they made Jodie smile and that was enough.

Rose reached over to her bedside table and grabbed a notebook from it. She always has one lying around in case she's inspired to write something, as you do. I used to think of myself as a bit of a poet until Rose arrived, but she is the real thing.

'How does the third line go again?' she asked.

'Are you writing it down?' I was flattered. She'd never written my words down before.

'It's great, Sash! Really catchy. Except I'm not sure if I've got that line right.'

'I can only remember it if I sing it,' I said, suddenly realising this was true. 'I know – why don't we just record it?' I waved my new iPhone at her, thinking this would be the perfect chance to get a new app. That phone was the most beautiful present I'd ever received and I was a little bit obsessed.

Rose agreed, curious, and I found a recording app. We worked out some extra verses, then tried the song out, all clustering round the phone, not sure where the mic was. It sounded OK, but a bit tinny. It was totally working as therapy for Rose's gloomy mood and Jodie's heartbreak, though.

Rose dug out the microphone she uses when she's recording her own songs and, miraculously, also an adapter to fit my phone. We sang it once more, in harmony, then played it back. Surprisingly, we didn't

sound too bad.

'That phone's *amazing,* Sash,' Nell said. 'I know – why don't I video us on it, too? Can I?'

Great idea, I said. Go for it. We don't have time now, but why don't we have a band get-together on my birthday? We can dress up, like we used to in the old days, and make loads of videos. It'll be hysterical.

Hahahahahahaha.

So we do.

My birthday is three weekends later, on the last Saturday of September. I invite them all over for a sleepover, and bring home a selection of spare dressing-up clothes from my Saturday job at a vintage shop.

Mum cooks us Thai green curry for lunch, because I'm turning sixteen and it's the most sophisticated thing we can think of. Then we nip upstairs to spend the afternoon dressing up as our favourite pop stars, because we haven't totally mastered maturity *yet*. Not in secret, anyway. Not when it's just us.

Highlights include our Abba interpretation, Jodie as Katy Perry, and Nell as Kylie Minogue, in gold sequin shorts and a white hoodie. She could practically *be* Kylie: it's uncanny. Rose does a long, sad Irish ballad, not entirely entering into the spirit of things, but it's beautiful. I am olden-days Britney Spears, in a mini-kilt and half my school uniform. We are also, if I say so myself, quite brilliant as Girls Aloud.

'Sunglasses' is last. We mime to the audio version we recorded in Jodie's room. By now we're getting tired and I'm half ready for bed.

It's the perfect end to a perfect day. We eat warm

brownies and homemade popcorn. We watch two *Twilights* back to back in our pyjamas and go to sleep at about five a.m., peppered in brownie crumbs, all huddled in a heap under our duvets on the floor.

Precisely four days later, my iPhone disappears.

Secrets

Reasons why you don't want to lose your brand new iPhone:

– Your mother goes crazy because she can't contact you if you get kidnapped by a deranged serial killer. Or if she suddenly needs you to buy milk on the way home from school. Whatever.
– You can't play your games, or check your apps, or watch TV in bed, or see what everybody is saying about everybody in school. Which is tragic.
– Your mother goes even more crazy because your father gave you that phone in America and even though she thought it was a 'mad, excessive present

for a teenage girl', she is still angry that it's gone.
– You don't know who's got it, or who's looking at all your secrets.

That's the real problem. Secrets.

Secrets like the fact that my dad doesn't work for Apple in California, like I told everyone. He doesn't even own a Mac.

Or that George Drury kissed me behind the speaker stacks at the Bigelow Music Festival last summer and his girlfriend doesn't know.

Or the mean things I've said about people at school that I assumed would remain private, but could be anywhere by now.

Or the videos. Oh my God. All those videos we took on my birthday, of us prancing around to Abba and Girls Aloud. We were so cheesy you could make a fondue out of us. Anyone who saw them would think we were six, not sixteen. If it was someone at St Christopher's who took my phone, just one of them will be enough to keep the whole place laughing for a year.

'I'm sure we'll find it,' says Nell on Friday for the fifty billionth time, taking the cushions off my bed and feeling down the gap between it and the wall with her hand. Despite the fact that my room looks like a clothes shop exploded in a library, Nell still seems hopeful.

'Where did you have it last?' Rose asks, looking up from her place in front of my wardrobe mirror, where she's fiddling with her hair.

I stifle a groan.

'I can't remember. I know I had it in my locker when I

got changed for dance class on Wednesday. And I thought it was in my bag when we were coming home. But I can't be sure now.'

Jodie, wearing an ancient top hat from my vintage collection over her long dark hair, is slouched on a beanbag, checking her own phone. It's a BlackBerry that her dad got a deal on. She was so jealous of my iPhone, and sure it would be stolen. Which is what she's convinced has happened. By someone who is using it, right this minute, to do something terrible.

'Are you sure your wi-fi's switched on?'

'Totally sure.'

'Well, I can't get a signal. I'm trying to check Interface.'

I sigh. If anyone *does* decide to share my secrets, the first place they will appear is Interface. It's the world's fastest-growing website. Ever since it came along, Interface has replaced Facebook, Twitter and YouTube on all our phones and computers, because it lets you share everything, all of the time. It's where we live our lives now: all conversations, invitations, photos and videos happen here. If you're not on Interface, you don't exist. And right now, if someone's looking at all that stuff on my phone, I'm not sure I want to.

'Have you suspended your contract?' Nell asks, glancing up momentarily from her search.

I bite my lip. 'Not exactly. I just keep hoping it'll turn up . . .'

'And have you tried Find My iPhone?'

'Yes. But that says it's still at school, and we've searched *everywhere*, and it just isn't.'

'Looking on the bright side, it might be on eBay.'

'Oh, great. So the good news is, my £400 present from

my dad is now being sold to a stranger.'

'Well, at least if it is,' Jodie sighs, 'nobody at school is going to get to see your interpretation of Beyoncé. In the leotard.'

Nell frowns and throws a cushion at her.

'Sasha told you not to remind her about the leotard.'

Rose is busy attempting to see what her hair would look like in Princess Leia-style plaits either side of her head. She has a perfect oval face, with big blue eyes, enhanced by masses of red-gold hair, but the plaits look like Danish pastries hanging over her ears. She catches my eye in the mirror and gives up on them. 'Ah, the Single Ladies leotard,' she sighs. 'It was a seminal moment.'

What is 'seminal'? Apart from being another thing I need to be deeply embarrassed about, obviously. OK, so before the whole Britney thing on my birthday, I did my 'Single Ladies' impression – in a black leotard from ballet and borrowed heels from Mum. I do the dance as a workout occasionally. All I can say is, it seemed like a good idea at the time.

'What does seminal m—' Jodie starts. But then she looks down at her BlackBerry and stares at the screen. She's got a signal now and she's obviously found something. From the expression on her face, it's *so* not good.

'Tell me. What?' I beg, rushing over.

She turns her phone out so I can see the screen. There's a puzzled, worried look in her eyes.

'It's this.'