

Chapter One



Last Monday afternoon, Izzy and I had the worst row ever. We used to get on really well, but just recently we've been fighting loads. Ever since she went to her new school, she thinks she's SO grown-up, and she can't be bothered with me. We never cuddle up on the sofa any more, and we never go shopping together. I used to love it when we did that – we used to giggle all the time, and come back with all sorts of rubbishy things that we both adored. But not now.

This particular row ended with Izzy pulling my hair and emptying my school bag all over the carpet, then storming up to



her bedroom and slamming the door. My mum was FURIOUS, and said it was all my fault, but it wasn't. Well, maybe just a teeny weeny bit, if I'm honest.

This is what happened.

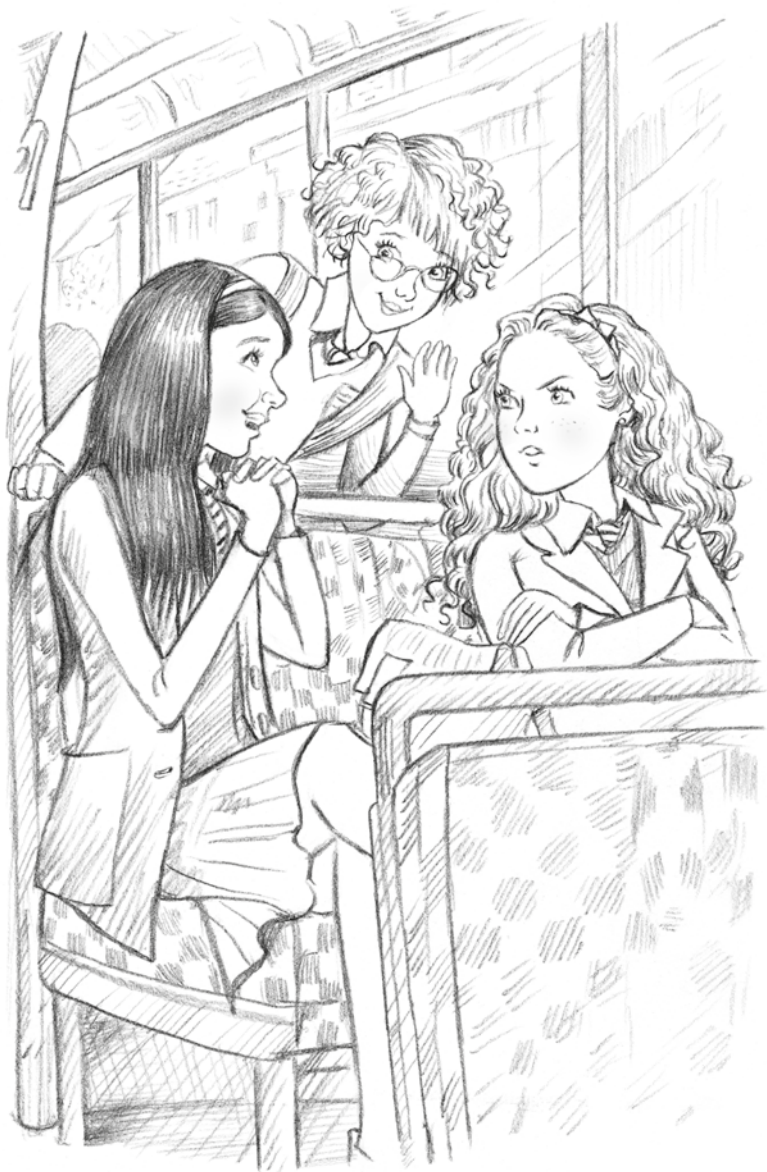
We were coming home on the bus – our schools are quite close, and sometimes we end up on the same one. Izzy was sitting with a tall girl, and I slid into the seat behind them. Izzy didn't say hello, or even look at me, and that made me cross.

"Hel-LO!" I said. "Little-sister alert! It's ME!"

The tall girl turned and gave me a beaming smile. She seemed much happier to see me than Izzy did. Then she looked at Izzy. "A little sister?" she said. "You never said you had a little sister."

Izzy wriggled in her seat and mumbled





something like, “You never asked, Di.”

Di raised her eyebrows, and turned back to me. “You look so cute. I’d LOVE a little sister like you.” She heaved a massive sigh. “I’ll tell you a secret, if you promise not to tell. Izzy knows, because she’s my best friend. But nobody else does. Promise?”

Of course I nodded.

“I don’t have any brothers or sisters. It’s just me and Mum, and Mum’s ill. She needs loads of looking after, and it’s me that has to do it.”

Di gave me a sad smile, and I saw she had tears in her eyes. Real tears! I thought Izzy would give her a hug, but she didn’t. That REALLY surprised me, because Izzy’s always been a total sympathy freak. She hugs little old ladies when they drop their shopping, and she hugs every shrieking



baby she can get her arms round, and she cries her eyes out if anyone even mentions little lost puppies.

I wanted to ask Di what was wrong with her mum, but I was scared she'd think I was cheeky. It sounded really awful, whatever it was.

"At least I've got friends," Di went on. "Friends like your big sister Izzy. I don't know what I'd do without her." She squeezed Izzy's arm. "Izzy's going to be an angel and help me with my homework, aren't you, Iz?"

"I always do, don't I?" Izzy sounded grumpy, but Di took no notice and I thought how nice she was not to mind. Di gave Izzy's arm another squeeze. "So you'll meet me tomorrow? Before school?"

That was when I had an idea. I wanted



to make up for Izzy being unhelpful, so I said, “Couldn’t she bring it round to your house?”

Di shook her head. “No good, cutie. My mum can’t cope with visitors. She has to lie down all the time, and the only person she wants to see is me.” She sighed again. “Poor old Mum.”

“Ah,” I said. I didn’t know quite what to say. “I’m ... I’m sorry.”

Di pinched my cheek. “It’s OK. I’m used to it.” Then she brightened. “But I could collect it tonight. Where do you live?”

“Launceston Lane,” I said. “Number 23.”

I got a dazzling smile. “Thanks. Your big sister’s lucky to have you. Isn’t she a total poppet, Izzy-wizzy?”

Izzy nodded. She was looking cross, and I knew why. She didn’t want me getting



friendly with someone from St Dunbow's. She never said anything about her friends there, and I was certain it was because she wanted to keep them for herself.

Di leant over and pulled Izzy's homework book out of her bag. "Let's have a look and see what we've—" The bus gave a lurch and Di dropped the book. It slid under the seat and another girl picked it up.



“This yours, Izzy?” she asked and then she looked at the book more closely. “That’s odd. Why does it say A Smith?” She turned to the girl beside her. “A for Isobel? First I’ve heard of it!” And they both laughed.

Izzy went very pink. “It’s just a mistake,” she said, and she snatched the homework book back and stuffed it in her bag.



Di gave Izzy a massive nudge, and winked at me. “You need to be more careful, Iz. Doesn’t she, cutie?”

“Yes,” I said, and I winked back at her. She was so nice! But Izzy didn’t seem to think so at all. It was weird! Di was her best friend, but Izzy was bundling her stuff together and pulling on her coat as if she couldn’t wait to get away.

“Hurry up, Madison. You’re so slow! It’s our stop any minute—”

I looked at my sister in astonishment, and she made a stupid face at me – and that did it. I stood up and said, very loudly, “I know it’s our stop, ARIZONA.”

Izzy went completely purple and grabbed my arm. “You little beast,” she hissed, and she hauled me down the aisle as if I was a sack of potatoes before pushing me off the



bus the second the doors opened. I heard Di calling after us, something about seeing us later, but Izzy didn't answer. She stomped home without saying a word – but as soon as we were through the door she started shouting at me. She said I was interfering and I'd ruined her life and I didn't know what I'd done because I was stupid and silly and a baby – oh, all sorts of stuff. And then she shut herself in her room.

So I suppose it *was* me that started the row ... but she didn't need to pull my hair. OR throw my stuff around.