

CHAPTER FOUR

**MUM TROUBLES
AND A PIG CALLED
BUBBLES**

Rose trudged glumly past the little red-brick houses on her street, Daffodil Close. The audition was a new low, even for her.

She'd thought she couldn't get any lower. Four years earlier, she'd been part of a happy family with a happy school life. But then her dad had died suddenly. Her mum became permanently sad and they ran out of money. They'd moved to a smaller house, and Rose had had to move to a different school where she didn't know a single

soul. Everything had changed for the worse.

Starting her new school had also coincided with Rose needing glasses, her red hair turning frizzy and her freckles breaking out like a meteor shower all over her cheeks. The only thing that kept Rose going was her father's belief that one day she was destined for greatness. He'd always told her she was going to find something she loved and be the BEST at it. He wasn't sure what that something was, but he'd had complete and utter faith that she would find it.

I'm just glad he wasn't there today, Rose thought. He would have been so ashamed.

Finally, she got to her house. Dion, her next-door neighbour, was in his driveway polishing his special Pontiac Firebird car.

Dion was a postman, but his real love was the movies. He finished work at 8.30 a.m. and spent most of the rest of his day watching films. His car was his pride and joy because it was THE ACTUAL CAR used in his favourite EVER movie, *Smokey and the Bandit*. The car had come up for sale ten years earlier, and Dion had paid \$23,000 for it (plus shipping). It was now worth nearly \$100,000, as it was considered a piece of classic movie memorabilia. Dion hoped that if he looked after it well enough, it might be worth a million dollars by the time he retired from the post office. Then he'd sell it and spend the rest of his life watching movies in his own private cinema.

Now, Dion was not a man of many words.

He preferred the company of movie characters to real human beings. But on this occasion, as he saw Rose marching towards him like some traumatised soldier at the end of a war film, he was compelled to speak.

“Cheer up, sweetheart. It might never happen,” he offered.

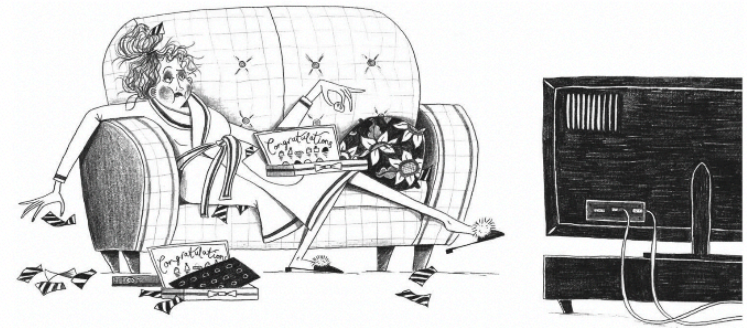
“It already has,” countered Rose, as she swept past him. “It’s called life.”

Walking down her little garden path was like wading through a jungle, so overgrown was the front lawn. Inside the house, things were as they always were. The red carpet was a faded pink and covered in crumbs, and the walls and shelves were curiously empty. After Rose’s dad died her mum, Suzy, had decided she didn’t

want any reminders of the past, and so had hidden away all the smiling photographs of the whole family.

Suzy was sitting in the lounge watching television, working her way through a box of Congratulations assorted chocolates as usual.

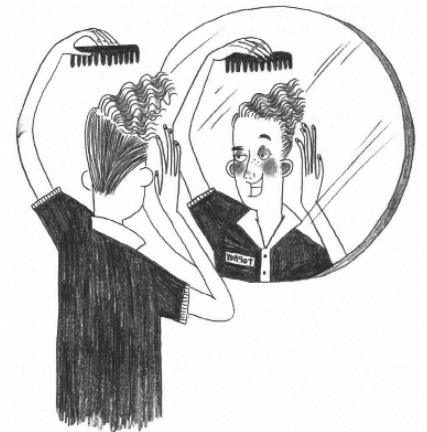
If you had to describe Suzy's face you would say it was ninety per cent lips. She had an enormous mouth with large white teeth like piano keys. She had a slender nose, large hazel eyes and scraggly brown hair that she used to keep in a trendy 'bird's nest' style, but now resembled an *actual* bird's nest, complete with the odd chocolate wrapper.



Rose's brother Kris was looking in the mirror and plucking his eyebrows.

"Oh, here she is!" Kris announced as Rose walked in the door.

Kris had major vanity issues. He couldn't pass a mirror without checking that his eyebrows were correctly plucked or his hair perfectly styled. It wasn't that Kris wasn't good



looking, he was, the problem was that he thought the only thing going for him was his symmetrical face, so he needed to make the most of it at all times. More than anything, it was the fact that Kris insisted on spelling his name with a K that told anyone all they needed to know about him. Appearances were everything.

“Have you seen this?” Kris said. He shoved his phone in Rose’s face just long enough for her to see that her audition video had now reached three thousand views.

“I don’t need to see it, do I? It WAS me. I was there!” Rose snapped back.

“What are you going to do about it? It’s embarrassing!” rasped Kris krossly – sorry,

krossly.

Rose frowned. “It’s embarrassing for me, not for you.”

“But what if people find out that you’re my sister?” her brother whined.

Kris had a long list of ways that his sister embarrassed him. She didn’t seem to care what she looked like, she tried to be good at things that she wasn’t, her best friend was a guinea pig – those sorts of things. Rose was a little confused by his embarrassment. She could sort of understand it while they were briefly at the same school, but he had left now and worked in the men’s fashion store Top Boy in the Oldwell Shopping Centre. So what was he worried about?

“Why don’t I just change my name then?” Rose

offered, sarcastically. “Or maybe I could move somewhere else. Disappear altogether. Would that suit you?”

“You’d do that for me?” Kris said, hopefully. He wasn’t good at picking up on subtle things, like sarcasm. He was even worse at irony. He thought that irony was something you did when you wanted to get the creases out of your trousers.

Rose huffed loudly and went to sit next to her mum on the couch. Perhaps she was looking for some words of comfort, but they were not forthcoming. Instead, mother and daughter sat together in silence.

Suzy was watching a re-run of last Saturday’s *Britain’s got Talented People*. She was currently viewing the favourite to win, a hot new

magician who had come from nowhere to blow away the judges, but she liked the behind-the-scenes sob stories the best. She liked them because she felt like she was a sob story herself.

Suzy had been a singer in a band called The Mondays. They’d had a few hit records in the nineties, but their star had faded. She then had a decent career as a solo singer, but after Rose’s dad died, it wasn’t the same. Rose’s dad, Barry, had loved to hear her sing. He’d never missed a performance. Seeing an empty chair where he should have been every night was too much for Suzy. So she’d stopped singing altogether.

“You get used to disappointment, darling,” Suzy said suddenly now. “You want my advice? Give up.”

“Give up singing?” said Rose, stung. She had decided that being a singer was her call to greatness. She’d seen her mum on stage when she was little and thought how cool it would be, to be up there, rocking out for all she was worth. And if her mum saw how good Rose was, then she might not be so sad any more. Maybe it would get her off the couch and singing again too?

“I mean, look what happened to me,” Suzy grumped, chewing a coconut Congratulation. She was still wearing her pyjamas, which helped her case. “And *I* had talent.”

Rose bit her lip. She knew her mum was sad and angry. But to say Rose had no talent? To say that to her *face*?

“That’s just plain rude!” cried Rose.

Suzy just thrust her hand into another box of chocolates. Then she appeared to remember something. Something very important. “Ooh!”

Rose wondered if her mum was about to apologise for saying she had no talent ...

“It’s half price fish and chips tonight.” Suzy stuffed a ten-pound note into Rose’s hand. “Here, go to the chippy after you’ve done your homework.”

Rose stomped upstairs to her bedroom, buried her head in her pillow and sobbed for Britain. If she’d been on a talent contest for the best at crying, she would have won hands down. She would have been Eurovision champion, Olympic champion, World Cup winner, the lot,

if only those prizes were awarded for crying instead of singing, athletics or football. But they weren't. So instead she was just the winner of the Little Girl Sobbing in Her Room on Her Own contest, for which there were no prizes but a wet pillow.

Just as her tear ducts had been pumped dry, Rose heard a familiar, comforting *squeak squeak* from the floor. It was Bubbles, her ever faithful guinea pig. She immediately popped his cage open, pulled him out and gave him an almighty cuddle.

Bubbles was always there for Rose. He never criticised her, said hurtful things about her, or posted embarrassing clips of her on YouTube. Not yet anyway. Rose loved Bubbles right down

to his fuzzy yellow fur and big black eyes, and Bubbles loved Rose right back. He showed her as much by pushing a small, oblong poo from his bottom into her lap. Rose was used to this. Guinea pigs pooped approximately every twelve seconds, and there was nothing you could do about it, except be glad they were dry and easy to dispose of.



Rose watched the poo bounce off her knee and on to a map of the world that she had opened up on the floor the night before. She'd been trying to puzzle out where she was going to live when the world finally realised what a brilliant singer she was. London? New York? Tokyo? But now Bubbles's poo had fallen

on Paris, could it be a sign?

Bubbles started nibbling at the case of Rose's smartphone that was sitting on her bedside table. Surely this was another sign. But a sign of what?

Rose switched the phone on. She didn't hear the familiar sound of pinging texts because she didn't use her phone to text her friends. She didn't really *have* any friends except Bubbles, and it was no use texting him as he didn't read or write. Or have thumbs. But Rose had bought the phone with money she'd saved up after her dad had died.

Suddenly Rose realised WHY the phone was a sign. Her dad!

Her dad used to tell a story about being in a

situation exactly like hers. Except without the talent show, and YouTube video, and guinea-pig poo. But other than that, really similar. When her dad was a kid, he'd told his family that he wanted to be an inventor. They'd all laughed at him and told him to forget such lofty ideas. The Falveys had been sheep farmers for generations, and that was his destiny too.

"Get back to shearing sheep!" they told him.

But Rose's dad never gave up on his dream. When he was sixteen years old, he ran away from the farm and didn't come back until he was a doctor of engineering. And from the moment he returned with an invention to shear sheep without giving farmers bad backs and sore knees (he called it the EasyPeasyShear – perhaps

you've heard of it?), his family were so proud of him, and so ashamed of themselves for doubting him.

YES! thought Rose, a plan crystallising in her head. This was what was going to happen to her! She was going to run away and prove herself, become a famous singer, come back and hand out big bags of cash – and then her mother and brother would be happy and proud at last.

Plus, she had ten whole pounds in her possession. Surely that would get her to Paris? She could walk to London and get some kind of cut-price bus the rest of the way there.

“Bubbles, you're a genius!” said Rose.

She put the guinea pig on her bed and got

to work packing. Bubbles responded by laying another oblong poo on Rosie's duvet as if to say, “I wouldn't be too sure, Rose, would a genius do that?”

*But alas
Bubbles could not
do a jot
to stop her!*

