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Mates, Dates

*The
Secret
Story*



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Lucy

It was a moment that was to change my life for ever.

I was sitting in the passenger seat, staring out of the window as Dad drove us home. It was raining – which seemed fitting for the grey mood I was in.

‘How was school?’ asked Dad.

I shrugged my shoulders. ‘OK,’ I replied. I didn’t feel like talking. I was thinking about Izzie. She’s been my best mate since junior school but something weird has been going on lately. A new girl arrived at the end of the summer term. Nesta Williams. She created quite a stir. She’s stunning for one thing – tall, dark-skinned with black hair like silk down her back, and she’s so confident. She’s everything I’m not. I’m small, blonde and totally unsure of who I am or where I fit in.

This September, we went into Year Nine and Izzie started hanging out with Nesta and now she’s always like, Nesta said this, Nesta did that. I’m scared that Izzie feels that she’s outgrown me, like I’m boring compared to her glam new mate. Or too childish.

The other night, we tried to get into a fifteen movie and

we were turned away. I knew it was my fault because Izzie and Nesta both look sixteen. I couldn't kid myself otherwise thanks to Josie – a mean girl from our school who was there in the queue. She looked my way then called out for everyone to hear, 'Anyone can see the midget's underage,' and when she swanned into the movie with a bunch of Year Elevens, she said, 'Leave the children to play.' That hurt. And Nesta looked cross – probably because we hadn't got in and it was because of me. I think she felt embarrassed to be seen with me too. So . . . I'm not sure if there's going to be room for me in Izzie's life any more. She clearly wants to move on and hang with the more grown up cool crowd.

Dad slowed down the car as the traffic lights changed and it was then that I saw him. A vision of boy babeness. He was coming out of the school gates at St Michael's and he crossed the road in front of us. Dark. Handsome. Chiselled jaw. A Disney prince in a schoolboy's black-and-white uniform, alive and walking the streets of North London. My heart sped up. It really did – *boom banga bang* in my chest – and I felt my stomach twist as I watched him. He didn't see me. He was talking to another boy. They were laughing about something.

Ohmigod, I thought. After all these months of looking for a boy and only finding weedy wombats. There he is.

'Lucy, you're blushing,' said Izzie later that same day.

'No, I'm not,' I objected, although I felt colour flush to my cheeks. Izzie is lucky, she never blushes. She has the looks of a typical Irish colleen: dark hair, green eyes, pale skin. Pale skin that always looks cool and in control.

I hate that I blush, I thought. It always gives my secrets away. I bet Nesta never blushes. I've tried wearing pale make-up to hide my red cheeks but it doesn't work – nothing does and my embarrassment is always evident to anyone who happens to be looking at me.

Izzie raised an eyebrow and gave me a look as if to say, 'Pull the other one'. I turned away from her and the computer where we'd been checking our horoscopes. I'd gone straight round to her house as soon as I'd had supper.

'So. What's going on?' asked Izzie.

There was no point in hiding it. I could never keep anything from her for long and I was bursting to tell her my news. 'I'm in love,' I blurted.

'Brilliant,' said Izzie. 'Who's the lucky boy?'

I shrugged my shoulders. 'Don't know.'

'What do you mean, you don't know?'

'I haven't actually spoken to him yet.'

'Ah. Do you know his name?'

I shook my head. 'I know what school he goes to. St Michael's.'

Izzie smiled. 'I suppose that's a start. And, er . . . how do you know it's love?'

'I just do,' I replied. I did.

'OK,' said Izzie. 'You just do.'

I nodded and settled back on the beanbag on the floor of her bedroom. I felt so much better. It was me and Iz doing our horoscopes and chatting like we always did. And I had seen the perfect boy. 'Yeah. I've never felt like this before and I just know he's going to feel the same when we meet. Er . . . don't

tell anyone though, will you?’

‘Course not,’ said Izzie. ‘Not if you don’t want. Your secret is safe with me.’

Tony

‘So come on, Tony. Tell us your secret,’ begged Robin as we crossed the road outside school. ‘I *need* help.’

‘No secret,’ I said. When we reached the other side, I saw that Annabelle Wilson and her mate Mira Jones were coming towards us on the pavement.

As soon as she spotted us, Mira flicked blond hair back off her face. ‘Hi, Tone,’ she said in a low voice and gave me a flirty look.

‘Hi, girls,’ I replied, and gave her a flirty look back (eye contact held a second too long, slightly raised eyebrow and slow smile) then I did the same to Annabelle. She blushed pink. I’d dated both of them last year. Not at the same time. I’d never have got away with it seeing as they’re mates. Mira in the winter for six weeks (a record for me as my cut off is usually around four), and Annabelle in the spring for just a few dates. She was sweet but boring after a while. I like a girl who can hold her own in the conversation stakes. Mira was more

interesting but she got possessive and I don't do clingy as she found out after yet another 'And where have you been and who with?' conversation.

The girls walked past and Rob and I continued on our way up towards Highgate. Rob turned around.

'They're watching,' he said.

I shrugged and carried on walking. 'Rule number one, my friend, never turn around. Makes you look too keen.'

'Oh right,' said Rob. 'I forgot. Treat 'em mean to keep 'em keen.'

'Ish,' I said. 'You don't have to be mean, just don't look desperate. Girls always want what they can't have. Remember that.'

Rob did a mock salute. 'So come on, Tony, spill. You clearly have the ability to pull any girl you want and I need a few hints.'

'Don't try too hard. Don't do needy.' I didn't know what else to tell him. I've never had to try. Girls like me. Always have, but I don't think it's because of anything I say or don't say, do or don't do. Sometimes I joke around and say I am the Master when it comes to girls but I'm not totally serious. It's simple. I like girls, they like me. Lucky me.

When we got up to Highgate, we went into Costa. We go in most nights after school and always try to bag the stools by the window. That way, we can check out the babes on the street as well as watch the ones inside.

Robin went to get our drinks while I got our places. He's been my mate since I changed schools at the end of last year. Like mine, his family had just moved to the area so he was a

newbie too. He's a good guy. On the level. Nice-looking boy, Robin, but no real talent when it comes to pulling. He's always, like, 'Hey, I've got this real cool chat up line, want to hear it?' And I'd go, 'Robin, reality check, man. You don't need a chat up line to get on with girls, you just talk to them like you like them, like you're interested in what they have to say.' Works every time.

Now he reckons he's in love. Hannah is her name. I've never seen him like this over a girl before. He only met her last week when we went bowling. She's OK. Not my type. Bit tomboyish – figure like a boy's too, straight up and down, and she doesn't seem to make much effort with her clothes, she's always in jeans and an old T-shirt. I like girls to look like girls. Especially those with a bit of style about them.

At that moment, Sienna Jeffrey waved from across the street. I waved back. She giggled and headed for the bus stop. About two minutes later, my phone beeped that I had a text. It was from Sienna. *Wot R U doing Fri pm? XXX*

Rob came back with our cappuccinos and read the text over my shoulder. He sighed. 'Sienna again? Isn't that the hundredth text this week?'

I nodded. 'Might have to change my phone.'

'Just text her back and say, there's a queue and you're way down the line.'

I laughed but I could never be that cruel. Girls have feelings and it's hard letting them down sometimes. We had a snog at a party a few weeks ago and now she thinks that we're an item. But Rob is right. There is a queue. My mobile beeped that I had another text. This time it was Carrie Johnson. *I know*

you feel the same way as I do, she'd written. 'Fraid not, I thought as I pressed delete, then glanced up to see that Jess Macdonald and Charlotte Rosin were on their way over. Rob perked up immediately as they are two total Barbie babes.

'Don't look so keen, look cool,' I whispered to Rob.

'Aye, aye, Captain,' he said and assumed a bored look and turned to look out the window.

Atta boy, Rob, I thought, *you'll get there in the end*.

Lucy

‘I do *not* believe you did that! How could you?’

‘I’m sorry, Luce,’ said Izzie as we went into assembly on Monday morning. ‘It just slipped out.’

I was mad. *Really* mad. Izzie had told Nesta my private business about being in love. ‘It was *meant* to be a secret,’ I said.

‘I know, I know, but we were talking about boys and love and stuff on the phone last night and it just came out.’

Grrrrr, I thought. *GrrRRRRRRRRR*. I wasn’t sure if I was more mad that she’d told Nesta my secret or because she’d been having a laugh with her about boys. Having a laugh and chatting about boys was what I did with Izzie. Iz and me. *Me* and Iz. The two of us. *Tivo*. It was another example of how things were changing with our friendship and I wasn’t sure I liked it.

‘I don’t want her coming with us on our “Find the Mystery Contestant” outings,’ I said. We’d agreed two things at the weekend. One was that we were going to refer to the boy as the MC, the Mystery Contestant, and the other was

that I needed a plan to meet him. Izzie had suggested that we go up to Highgate and hang out after school every night. It was a good plan. A great plan and I felt excited about it. I could see it in my mind's eye. I'd spot him. He'd see me. He'd feel the connection just like I had when he crossed the road in front of me. Everything would go into slow motion. Sadly the image in my mind's eye kept getting poked out by Nesta. What if he saw her first? I wouldn't stand a chance. She's a boy magnet. She could be a model if she wanted. I'm not even near her league.

'No worries,' said Izzie. 'Nesta's got rehearsals for the school show just about every night.'

'Does she know about the plan?' I asked.

Izzie looked sheepish.

'Izzie!'

Izzie threw up her hands. 'Give her a break, Lucy. She was really pleased you'd seen a boy you liked. And OK, so she knows the plan but she's not going to ruin it for you. She won't be coming with us. She wants to be friends, you know.'

'She wants to be friends with *you*,' I said and then I hated myself for acting like a strop queen. I don't know what's the matter with me lately. Jealous. Moody. Cross! And that can all be in the space of five minutes some days. Not only that, our teacher Wacko Watkins has given us a project – *What Makes Me Me?* It feels like the final straw. Seems everyone in our class has done it no problemo. They all know what they want to do when they leave school, what they're about, what their goals are. Not me though. I don't know who I am, what I want to be or where I fit. The one thing I have ever been

sure of in my life was that Izzie Foster was my best friend and now even that isn't a definite any more.

Lucy's diary

24th September

Quelle week terrible (to be read in a French accent). Actually, if anyone does read this, I will have to kill them (that's YOU, Lal). Note to self – remember to always lock my diary away after I've written in it, especially after the humungous secret I am about to write in here. Also change the hiding place from under my mattress because I think Lal may have cottoned on to where I've been keeping it and we all know how nosy my dear brother is. Luckily I haven't written too much in it so far, but, now that Izzie isn't as available, I probably will. So, Lal, if you ever find my new hiding place and read it again, you are a dead man and I mean that.

What a week! After three evenings up in Highgate with Izzie, looking for my mystery boy in the cafés, at the bus stops, at the school gates, we were beginning to think that maybe I had dreamed him. We saw boys of every shape and size, but did the MC appear? Not on your nelly, as my gran used to say.

And then . . .

This evening, after checking out the school gates, we headed up to Costa and that's where my life, my dreams, my future were shattered for ever. Just before we got to the café, Nesta appeared. My heart sank because I could see that every boy in the vicinity was checking her out. I thought it was game over for me. If mystery boy saw her, he'd fall in love, think that I was her pet elf (although I think I have grown a quarter of an inch and am now four foot ten and a half!) and that would be it, end of story.

Just as we were about to go into Costa, Nesta took a detour into the newsagent's. Iz and I went to get drinks and scanned the café. So far so good – no sign of my boy.

I looked out of the window in case he was on the street. Suddenly my mouth dropped open. Nesta was coming out of the newsagent's. And she wasn't alone. She was with him! *HIM!* My MC!

I could hardly believe my eyes. Iz and I had spent almost a whole week looking for him and, not only had Nesta bumped into him, but in two minutes, *two minutes*, she'd got chatting to him! *Talk about a fast worker*, I thought.

Seconds later, Nesta and his lovely lovelinesss were standing before me. (He was even better-looking close up.) And then Nesta introduced him as her brother, Tony! Brother!!!! I swear my jaw must have hit the floor. It didn't add up. Nesta is dark-skinned. Tony is white. (I was a colour all of my own. Red, red, red.) Turns out he's Nesta's half-brother. Same dad, different mum. Nesta's mum is her dad's second wife. But MY MC IS NESTA'S BROTHER!!!!!!! Ugabugabulah!

And that's when I knew that I could never tell anyone – not Izzie, certainly not Nesta – that Tony was the boy I'd been looking for all week. If he ever found out that I'd been up there looking for him, he'd think I was totally desperate. And if Iz and Nesta found out, it would be a huge laugh for them but utterly humiliating for me.

And then things got even worse – so bad, that I think the tiniest detail of our conversation will be imprinted on my brain for ever. My mind has been replaying and replaying the scene over and over in the fear that I may have given my secret away.

'So. Which one of you is Lucy?' Tony asked.

'I am,' I whispered. I felt wobbly and faint.

'Nesta tells me that you've got your eye on one of the St Michael's

boys.' (*Hah! Like, yeah. Like, I have and it's you. Argh!*) 'I go there, so I might know him.' (*Hahahaha. Not. More like double argh!*) 'I'm in Year Twelve. What year is he in? What does he look like?' (*What does he look like? YOU. Argh. Oh! My! God! This is like my worst nightmare. It can't be happening.*)

My cheeks burned furiously. I remember I stuttered something stupid like, 'Er, tall, er . . . hair. He was, um, too far away for me to get a close look.'

And then Izzie piped up: 'Just find us the best-looking boy at your school and that will be him.' (By this time, I think I might have left my body and have been watching the whole scene from the ceiling.)

Tony flashed me a cheeky smile. 'Best-looking boy in the school? But . . . you're looking at him.'

I may have laughed a little too hysterically at this point. *Best-looking boy in the school? I know you are – but do you know I know? Argh. Argh. Argh.*

I couldn't wait to get out of there. What a totally awful outcome, the worst possible. What with Tony asking me to describe the boy and Nesta saying that she reckoned that the reason I hadn't seen the boy was because he might have been doing some extra-curricular class like Tony often did (!!!!), I could not believe that they hadn't twigged that Tony was my MC. It was sooooo obvious to me. But it appeared that they hadn't. And now I can never tell Izzie or Nesta and especially not him or he will think I am a sad weirdo. It will have to be my secret for ever.

Tony

‘So what do you think of Lucy and Izzie?’ asked Nesta when we got on the bus to go home.

‘Sweet,’ I told her.

‘Both of them?’

‘Which is which again?’

‘Lucy is the blonde one.’

‘Yeah. She’s a sweet kid. I liked the way she blushed. I like girls who blush. It’s cute.’

‘Izzie is the taller one. She’s got beautiful eyes, hasn’t she?’

I laughed. ‘Has she now? Can’t say I noticed. Nesta, don’t even start. Your mates are way too young for me.’ Nesta had done this before – when we lived down in Bristol. She was always bringing her friends home from her school who then got a crush on me and she’d get mad at me if I didn’t fancy them.

‘I wasn’t starting anything like that, you dopehead. In fact, if you showed any interest in either Izzie or Lucy, I’d have to kill

you. I know what you're like and I don't want to be held responsible for romantic let-downs.'

'No chance, Nesta. Way too young for me. I like girls with a bit of experience.'

'Good, because I want them to like me and I don't want you messing things up by playing with their heads or their hearts.'

'As if. But what do you mean you want them to like you? They're your mates, aren't they? They have to like you. That's the rules. Mates like you.'

'They're *new* mates,' said Nesta. 'Still early days and I'm not sure that Lucy likes me at all. I think Izzie does but Lucy can be a bit aloof some days and I don't know what's going on in her head.'

'She's the blonde one, yeah?'

Nesta nodded. 'Yeah. Like, I've been round her house and met her family, she's got two brothers and we all had a laugh, but then sometimes she goes quiet and I catch her looking at me and . . . I don't know what's she's thinking.'

Tony squeezed my arm. 'Been tough for you, hasn't it, being the newbie?'

'Ish.' She shrugged, then grinned. 'I'll win them over.'

'You always had so many mates round where we used to live,' said Tony. 'Must be hard starting again. It's different with boys. They're not as weird about friendships as girls. Like Rob. We were both newbies, new to the school at least, put on the same footie team. He's a bit of a laugh, he's got a brain so we became mates. End of story. Simple.'

Nesta nodded. 'I was the *only* new girl in our year last term.'

And yeah, it has been a challenge. Like everyone in our class started together in Year Seven, that's two years they've had together so the friendships have been established. And it's not that anyone's been unfriendly, well . . . except for one girl who's a right cow, Josie Riley.'

'Why's she a cow?'

Nesta wrinkled her nose. 'I bumped into her and her mates in the cloakroom when I first arrived and she put my books in the sink and turned on the taps. When I asked why she'd done that, she said, "Oh, it's an initiation for all new girls," except we both knew that I was the *only* new girl.'

'She's probably jealous, Nesta. You're great-looking and sometimes girls can't handle that. She's threatened.'

'Maybe. She was mean to me when I went to the movies with Iz and Lucy – trying to humiliate us because we couldn't get in. Then some boy she was after made a beeline for me. She didn't like it. She told all of us to stick to Disney – she even said in a loud voice while looking at Lucy, "Anyone can see the midget's underage".'

'Ouch,' I said.

'Yeah. OK, so Lucy looks young but Josie didn't need to say that in front of everyone. She really annoyed me.'

'Sounds to me like she's definitely jealous of all of you. Don't let her get to you.'

'I won't, but girls like her make me realise how important it is to have the *right* mates. Mates who are on my side, who will stick up for me and me for them. Izzie and Lucy stood out straight away as solid as well as fun. I *really* want them to be my mates.'

‘No one else?’

‘There’s a girl called TJ who seems OK but she only hangs out with her mate. Izzie put out the hand to me, if you know what I mean – the hand of friendship. Izzie’s really interesting. A bit mad, bit wacky, but I like that. She’s into new age stuff like crystals and aromatherapy, I think she even does a bit of witchcraft.’

‘What’s Lucy like?’

‘Lucy? Hmm. She might be small but she’s got great style, like she knows how to put an outfit together. And she’s funny but . . . solid too. Like you know some girls can be like hyper or giddy, the kind who scream at the slightest thing —’

‘Tell me about it,’ I said when, as if on cue, a bunch of girls behind us starting screaming with laughter.

‘Or bitchy. Some girls can be so bitchy, but Lucy’s not like that. She’s, yeah, solid but, as I say, not sure she likes me.’

Tony put his hand on mine. ‘Who could resist the Nesta Williams charm? She’ll come round when she gets to know you better. Invite them over, put out the hand of friendship to her too. It’s got to be a two-way thing. In fact, I bet she’s a little intimidated. You can be scary, you know.’

‘Me? You think?’

‘Yeah. You’re stunning, you’re confident —’

‘But I’m not. Not all the time. I just know how to act confident.’

‘Well, Lucy doesn’t know that. Show her your more vulnerable side.’

‘I guess I could invite her over. Her mum has said that she can decorate her bedroom so I could invite her to come and

talk décor?

‘Good plan.’

‘And you’re not going to be home when they come over to ruin it for me?’

‘I am *so* not interested, except that if you want these girls as your friends, then I hope it works out. They seemed nice. But I will go out if it makes you feel better.’

‘Good. Because the *last* thing I need is one of them falling for you and getting her heart broken.’

Lucy

Lucy's diary

25th September

Tony is the One.

Tony

Nicky? Annabelle? Janie? Jess? Marie? Bea? Or Tia?

Friday night party at Des's house. Who to take? So many girls, so little time . . .

Lucy

‘Nesta’s invited us over. You up for it?’ asked Izzie. ‘Her mum has loads of interior design mags so we can think about how to do your bedroom. Lucy, you there?’

Ohmigod, oh Lordie, oh heckity doodah, I thought. Nesta’s. That means Tony might be there. What shall I wear? Will he be in? How can I make sure I don’t blush this time but say something cool and interesting and witty?

‘Lucy?’

‘Yeah. Yes,’ I replied. ‘I’m here. Um, yeah. I’m up for it. Don’t think I’m doing anything.’

Tony

I got home around four and could hear that Nesta had some of her mates over. Oops. She'd said that she didn't want me here when they came but I hadn't realised that it was that night. Never mind, too late now I was home. *What were their names again?* I asked myself. *Lizzie and, drat, can't remember the name of the small one who blushed. Shame, because girls like it when you remember their name and I like to impress. Ah well. I'll have to bluff it.*

The voices were coming from . . . hey, blooming cheek! It sounded as if they were in my room. I made my way down the corridor and burst in. It was so funny because the little one was in there with Nesta and she went bright red, like she'd been caught doing something really naughty.

'Just giving Lucy the tour,' said Nesta.

Lucy. Ah, that was her name.

'Only too happy to come home and find pretty girls in my bedroom. Hi, Lucy.'

She went even redder than before. Result! ‘Hi,’ she replied.

‘So how’s the search for the mystery man going?’ I asked.
‘The one with the hair?’

She shuffled about awkwardly and looked at the carpet.
‘Er . . . haven’t seen him again,’ she muttered. She really was painfully shy.

‘We need a plan,’ said Nesta. ‘To get Lucy noticed. You like girls, Tone. What do you look for? What do you find attractive?’

I decided to give Lucy the benefit of some good advice. She was sweet. I’d like to help her find her mystery boy. I gave her my full attention and most charming smile. ‘I like girls who are funny. Who make me laugh. And girls who know who they are, what they want and where they’re going. Confidence, I suppose. It’s a real turn on for boys.’

For some reason, Lucy looked horrified. I even thought for a second that she was going to cry.

‘Um, yes . . . er . . . fine,’ she stuttered. ‘Where’s the loo, Nesta?’

Lucy

Lucy's diary

26th September

A total nightmare of a day. I asked Izzie if she fancied Tony. She says she doesn't. Said he's too pretty. Then she asked me if I did. No way, I said, lying.

I went to Nesta's for the first time. She lives in Highgate in a fab garden flat which is so glam with lots of Eastern rugs and rich colours. Fabbie dabbie. Nesta gave me the tour while Izzie sat and read magazines. Tony arrived back and found Nesta and me in his bedroom. It felt weird being in his room looking at his private things and seeing where he sleeps. I was soooooo embarrassed that he would think I was sneaking about in his stuff like some sado.

He must never ever ever ever find out that he is my MC, otherwise he will think I am desperate and a stalker, but I wonder if it's too late and he already knows – like, he asked if I had seen the mystery boy again and then he gave me a knowing look. Then Nesta asked what Tony wanted in a girl and he blabbed on about

confidence and girls that make him laugh, all the time with this big grin on his face and a twinkle in his eye. I swear he was mocking me.

He went out again and then Nesta and Izzie spent the rest of the afternoon going on about how I could get noticed by boys. All I wanted to do was get home and hide under my duvet. I am going to give up on boys. I will never get one. I will never get one like Tony. I think he thinks I am stupid. I am a sad failure, plus I'm not even five foot tall and I have no boobs. Life stinks.

Tony

Nesta's got her mates over again, I thought as I let myself in and heard girls' voices. It was a week since I'd caught Nesta giving Lucy the tour of my room, and, happily for Nesta, she did seem to be getting well in with them. I was glad for her.

I closed the front door quietly and tiptoed over to the door to listen in on their conversation. I wasn't going to go in because I'd promised Nesta that I wouldn't get in the way of her making friends with them. They were talking about snogging. Irresistible not to stay and listen. One of them was talking about snogging a boy who tasted of onions. She hadn't been impressed. Yeah. Quite right. Big mistake. On my list of rules for snogging, fresh breath is a big must. Nesta admitted to snogging seven boys. Wow. *Way to go, sis*, I thought. I knew she'd kissed at least four. I made a mental note to get her to confess all another time.

'How many have you snogged?' I heard Nesta ask. I peeked through the crack of the door to see who she'd asked. She had directed the question to the small one. Lucy. Sweet. She went red.

‘None,’ she said. ‘I’ve never seen anyone I like.’

‘Except mystery boy,’ said the dark-haired girl, Izzie. ‘Don’t forget him.’

Hmm, I wonder who this mystery boy is? I asked myself. *I’m bound to know him if he’s at our school.* Izzie had just begun talking about the boys she’d snogged when I had an idea. I opened the door and stood there, hands on hips, tadah! There was that look of horror on Lucy’s face again, like when I caught her in my bedroom. I went over and flopped down next to her.

‘The art of kissing,’ I said. ‘My speciality.’

‘You wish,’ said Nesta. ‘You know nothing.’

‘I know more than you think, actually,’ I said, turning to Lucy. ‘Want me to show you how it’s done?’

‘Tony,’ said Nesta in a warning tone.

Little Lucy turned from pink to red to purple. I wished I had a camera.

‘Leave her alone,’ said Izzie.

‘I was just offering to show her how it’s done,’ I said. ‘Then she’ll have something to measure it against in the future.’

Lucy giggled.

‘Yeah, she’ll know what it’s like to be kissed by a bigheaded show-off —’ Nesta started. ‘Go away, Tony.’

I turned to Izzie. ‘You want to try?’ I asked.

‘In your dreams,’ she replied. Cheek. She’s not my type, so why did I bother wasting the charm on her? *Save it for the ones who respond*, I thought as I turned back to the blusher by my side.

‘Lucy. Do you want to learn from the Master?’ I asked.

‘The Master?’ Nesta guffawed.

OK, *I'll show you girls*, I thought. I turned to look at Lucy who looked like she had frozen. I tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, tilted her face up to look at mine. Slowly, slowly does it. No rush, and actually she has a nice face, elfin with pretty blue eyes and a sweet mouth, like a pink flower, and she didn't seem to be objecting now that we were close – in fact, I could see her leaning towards me slightly. She smelled nice too, clean, of apples or some other fruit. I looked deep into her eyes. She looked back and for a second there was a flutter of chemistry. All the better . . .

'Tony!' I heard Nesta say again behind me.

Ha ha. Too late. 'Close your eyes,' I whispered to Lucy. She did as she was told. And then I kissed her. Slow, tender and, actually, nice. Better than I expected and . . . yeah, no doubt about it, she was kissing me back. Very nice. The Master rides again.

Suddenly a hand grabbed the back of my shirt.

'In the kitchen. Now!' Nesta demanded.

I laughed and got up to follow her. Before I went in, I turned back to Lucy. She looked slightly dazed but happy enough, so what was Nesta's problem? I shrugged and gave Lucy a 'What can I do?' look. She shrugged and grinned back. I was beginning to like her. She clearly had a naughty streak.

Hah! I thought as Nesta hauled me into the kitchen. *I don't care what you have to say. Your mate fancies me. I can tell. And I bet that now she's snogged me, that mystery boy she likes will take second place in line behind MOI.*