

POP GIRL

TALLIA
STORM
AND
LUCY COURTENAY

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My name is Storm Hall.

First let's get all the "storm" jokes out of the way. I've heard them all, and at seven thirty a.m. in the dreech (that means miserable, by the way) Glasgow weather, I'm not really in the mood! No, my sister is not called Lightning; no, my hair was not electrocuted by a freak thunderstorm; and no, I do not have a face like thunder! Standing in the rain outside the school gate is hardly a laughing matter.

Not that I'm here as punishment, you understand. It was my idea, and I'm dragging my best friend, Belle, along for the ride.

Being on school premises before eight a.m. is against the rules here at Endrick School. You'd think they'd be glad to see us so excited—but no. Mrs. McCulloch will self-destruct if she gets a whiff of us breaking the rules.

While I'm waiting, I pull on my headphones, flick to an Ivy Baxter tune, and crank up the volume.

Bam, bam, bam, BA-dada, BA-dada. Much better.

Let me catch you up on all things Ivy, Ivy, Ivy. In short, she is the greatest performer of all time! Belle and I got to see her a few months ago. It was the moment I knew what I wanted more than anything in the world.

To sing.

Forget everything else. Music is my life.

Belle and I are both singers. That's the whole point of this morning's little adventure.

So right now, I'm leaning against a wall outside the gate trying to look cool as I read Belle's text. She's running late—no surprise there!

Belle is much better at covert operations than I am. She is Scottish, after all, and the best James Bond

ever was Sean Connery, right? But then I'm Scottish, too, and my spy skills are somewhat lacking!

I text her quickly:

Mission control intel reports all clear. Proceeding to Stage 1.

I turn up the collar on my jacket and give the front gate my best here-I-come look. (Already I'm thinking James Bond might fancy me as the new teen Q?)

I slide my phone into my pocket and press myself a little more closely against the wall. Correction: against the pinboard against the wall. The pinboard still has pins in it. "Heyyyy!" I yell. (It hurts like crazy.)

"Nice to see you, too." My BFF has finally rolled up.

"Belle!" I whisper, rubbing the back of my shoulder. "Thought you were running late?"

Belle gives a nod. "We're not outside MI5—relax!"