

ALL ABOUT MIA

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Everyone in Rushton knows the Campbell-Richardson sisters.

Grace is the oldest and destined for a first from Cambridge. Signature scent: grapefruit shampoo, secondhand books, and perfection.

Audrey is the youngest and destined for the Olympics. Signature scent: chlorine, Lucozade Sport, and discipline.

Then there's me, Mia. I'm in the middle. I have no idea what my destiny is. Signature scent: coconut oil, Haribo, and TROUBLE.



“I feel like getting wasted tonight,” I announce.

It’s a Friday evening in early June. Me and my three best friends—Stella Fielding, Mikey Twist, and Kimmie Chu—are packed into Stella’s messy bedroom, the air thick with perfume and hairspray.

Mikey rolls his eyes at the others. “No offense, Mia,” he says, “but when do you *not* feel like getting wasted?”

He makes a valid point. My fondness for getting drunk is one of my trademarks.

“Yeah, but tonight I feel like getting *especially* wasted,” I say, sloshing at least three fingers’ worth of vodka into a plastic beaker before topping it up with a splash of Diet Coke. I stir it with my straw, watching as the liquid turns the color of dirty paint water.

“Why? What’s the occasion?” Kimmie asks, blowing on her newly painted fingernails.

“Does there have to be one?”

“I suppose not.”

The truth is, I’ve had a crappy week. The evidence so far:

On Monday I dropped my iPhone on the patio when I was out on the roof having a late-night cigarette, and now the screen is all cracked and Mum and Dad are refusing to replace it again.

On Wednesday, the English essay I worked really hard on for once came back with a big fat D on it and the words “a poor effort” scrawled on the top in red pen.

On Thursday, I was hauled into the head of sixth form’s office for “flouting” the sixth-form dress code for the third time this term. Apparently my ripped jeans were “inappropriate for an academic environment.” I argued back for a bit, telling Mr. Joshi that whether you could see my kneecaps or not had no reflection on my ability to discuss the symbolism in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but he was having none of it, confiscating my hooped earrings while he was at it for good measure.

The real nail in the coffin though, the cherry on top of the big fat cake, happened earlier today. I was in the sixth-form social area scrolling through Instagram when a selfie of my ex-boyfriend Jordan, kissing some blonde girl I’ve never seen before, popped up on my feed. Straightaway I got that horrible sick feeling in my stomach, the sort that makes your insides slosh about like unset jelly.

I down my drink and pour another.

“Someone’s phone,” Stella says, turning down the iPod speakers.

It’s mine. I pluck it off the bed and peer at the shattered screen. “MUM” flashes back at me. I consider not answering but I know she’ll only go and leave me a really long voice mail message if I don’t.

“I’ll be back,” I say, putting down my beaker and heading out onto the landing, shutting Stella’s bedroom door behind me.

I swipe my finger across the screen.

“Hey, Mum, what’s up?” I ask, dangling my spare arm over the banister.

“Hi, sweetheart, change of plan; I’m going to need you at home tomorrow,” Mum says.

“But I’ve got plans with Stella.”

“You see Stella every day at school.”

“That’s not the same. This is chill time,” I say, my voice venturing dangerously close into whining territory, something I know Mum *hates*.

“Well, I’m sorry, Mia,” she says, “but you’re going to have to *chill* another day.”

“Why? What’s going on?”

“Grace is coming home.”

What? But Grace isn’t due back for another six weeks. Since last September my older sister has been in Greece volunteering on an archaeological dig. Which I just don’t get. I mean, Greece is nice for a holiday and everything, but why would you willingly spend your entire gap year digging for bits of broken pottery when you could be somewhere cool and exotic like Thailand, sunbathing and tubing and going to full moon parties? But then most of what Grace does bewilders me. Grace and I may have the same blood and DNA and stuff, but that’s kind of it; we are chalk and cheese to the extreme.

“When?” I ask, swapping my phone to the other ear, as if that’s going to make a difference to the news Mum is delivering.

“Tomorrow,” she answers.

“But how come?”

“She just said that she’d done all she wanted to do, and it felt like time to come home. Between you and me, I think she might be feeling a bit homesick.”

I scrunch up my face. Who suddenly gets homesick after nearly nine whole months away?