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Opening extract from
All Sorts of Possible

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Published by
Simon & Schuster Ltd

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First published in Great Britain in 2015 by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd
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1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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London
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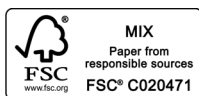
Simon & Schuster Australia, Sydney
Simon & Schuster India, New Delhi

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

HB ISBN 978-1-4711-4366-3
eBook ISBN 978-1-4711-1894-4

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the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance
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Typeset in the UK by Hewer Text UK Ltd, Edinburgh
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY



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1

When the sinkhole opened, there was no time to brake or turn the wheel, and the old green Land Rover was snatched off the dirt road over the smoking rim.

The teenage boy in the passenger seat blinked as blue sky was ripped from the windscreen and trees launched themselves like rockets.

He was a raggedy doll thrown forward as the car was swallowed down into the world.

2

The boy's eyes flicked open and he panicked, thinking the Land Rover was still falling, but it wasn't. The car was stationary, pointing down, his seat belt braced across him and his chin buttoned tight to his chest.

'Dad?'

His hands wouldn't stop trembling until he gripped the seat to turn and look.

Trussed in the seat belt, his father could have been asleep.

'Dad? Can you hear me?'

The boy edged closer, stopping when he heard stones popping out from beneath the tyres and the Land Rover groaning, wanting to move.

'DAD?'

He kept watching the drumbeat in his father's temple until every sound around them had died away, too afraid to do anything else.

3

The windscreen was shattered but not broken. Through the open window next to him the boy could see between bars of dirty sunlight all the way to the other side of the sinkhole.

The hole was huge, black and dirty, like the filthy inside of some industrial flue.

He could smell the cold.

Hear damp crackling on stones.

He kept breathing slowly until he had focused clearly on what to do next.

But his phone wasn't in the pockets of his shorts or the plastic well between their seats. Not even in the side of his door. When he tried thinking back to where it had been before the sinkhole had opened, all he kept remembering . . .

. . . was the sunlight flaring in the windscreen as he tried to tell his father one last time that he didn't want to go camping, shouting . . .

***It** was a waste of time, **not** the PlayStation.*

*That he was **too old** for camping now.*

*That he was **done being a kid** and should be able to do whatever he wanted.*

And then the road had opened up as if answering him back.

He clicked out of his seat belt, using an arm to brace himself against the glove compartment as he leant forward to search for his phone, hunting for it like a cat in the space under his seat. But all he found was an old shopping list written on the back of an envelope in his father's hand.

*'**I hate** you, Dad.'*

That was the last thing he had said, after being told his PlayStation would be thrown out if he carried on complaining.

The boy shivered. He was only wearing a T-shirt. Somehow, even the marrow in his bones felt cold. He reached back into the rear seats for his North Face jacket and managed to slip it on, the Land Rover creaking as stones tumbled unseen around them, until he realized it was just their echoes. It made him wonder how deep the sinkhole might be and how far

they had fallen, whether he could climb out and get help.

He peered out of the open window, just a little way at first.

The car was a long way below the level of the road, sunk into a dark scree that looked like mining spoil piled against one side of the hole. Tiny stones streamed out from around the tops of the Land Rover's tyres as if the rubber was slowly melting.

Daring to lean out further, the boy realized the sinkhole was even bigger than he had first thought. As wide as a football pitch, but far deeper than the length of one. He could see a stream at the bottom, as purple as a vein in the low light.

In the cool, dank updraught, he smelt wet stone and petrol and soil.

'Hello!' he shouted, looking up at the rim of the sinkhole and the fat crescent of blue sky above it. '*HELL-LO!*

A dark hole of his own suddenly appeared inside him as he wondered how many people drove down the dirt road in a single day.

Ducking back in the car, he gripped the door handle, imagining the PlayStation version of himself clambering out of the Land Rover and wading through the thick dark scree, then climbing the wall of the sinkhole and disappearing into the blue sky for help.

He thought hard about everything.

About what might go right.

And what could go wrong.

And then his iPhone rang.

4

He pushed his head out again, looking all around as the sinkhole tried to trick him with its echo, its walls ringing too. He remembered now. He'd been holding his phone, his elbow resting on the open window, the trees blipping by as he shouted at his father.

He worried it would stop ringing, that he would never find it, and then he saw the phone some way below him among the dark stones, daylight catching on its screen.

Clicking open the door, he heard the car's suspension bushes twang and the tyres straining, wanting to move, and he whispered over and over that he was lighter than air. But the scree swallowed his foot like murky water, and then sections below him sheared off, sending the phone clattering deeper into the hole, the ringtone mewling as it fell.

When the Land Rover suddenly lurched and started to slide, he yanked the door shut and turned quickly, clasping his right arm round the back of the driver's seat, and his left one across his father's chest, to try and keep him safe.

5

The Land Rover had fallen further, about halfway into the hole, and was lying lopsided. Its faded green paintwork was dappled with gold where spots of sunlight caught it.

The boy was already slip-sliding his way down the loose dark rubble, plotting a route to the iPhone below as the voicemail rang.

One bar on the phone was enough to make the call to the emergency services, but the woman's voice at the other end was faint, foamy with crackle, and it was like talking to the spirit world. He told her his father was breathing but unconscious. That they had been on the dirt road going towards Farnham's Wood. But he didn't know the road number when she asked him for it, saying it was just called the 'Back Road' by everyone who knew it. He told her to *sendsomeonequickly*.

‘Just hurry!’ he shouted. ‘My dad’s trapped in the car.’

‘Someone’s already on their way,’ she said. ‘They’ll be there as quickly as they can.’

He nodded as though she was beside him, then whispered he was scared.

‘I’ll be with you till someone comes, I promise,’ said the woman on the phone. ‘I’m Mary. Tell me who you are. Tell me all about you. Keep talking to me so I know you’re OK.’

‘My name’s Daniel. I’m fifteen. There’s just me and Dad because my mum died when I was born. I’m just a normal kid, nothing special.’

‘You’re being brave now and that makes you very special indeed.’

A loud cracking sound made him look up and he watched the sinkhole’s mouth opening wider by a couple of metres as a chunk of wall fell away from the very top. It broke apart in the air and crashed down against the side of the hole. The scree hissed. Rubble clattered on to the Land Rover. Daniel had to dodge and twist and cover up as stones rained down around him.

When he looked up again he saw huge, jagged cracks appearing in the walls and he realized that far larger sections of rock were going to fall.

‘I can’t wait,’ he shouted into the phone as he started slogging his way back up the slope towards the Land

Rover. 'I've got to get him out of the car.' Static furred the line and Daniel pressed the phone harder to his ear. 'Hello?'

'Daniel?' came her faint voice back, and then the line went dead and the single bar was gone.

It was harder work than he thought, climbing up the slope, and Daniel soon saw that there was no way of reaching the Land Rover and pulling his father out before the black, crooked columns of rock above him came crashing down. Even so, he wanted to keep going anyway, just to try and be with him. But, when the light began to dim more quickly, he panicked and some ancestral working in his brain took over, telling him there was nowhere to go except down, because he would be safer there. He felt something tear in his heart as he turned round and went stumbling deeper into the hole.

He moved as fast as he could, slipping and sliding down the dirty scree, frightened of being hit from behind with rocks constantly falling. He told himself his father would be OK in the Land Rover because it would protect him, saying it over and over like a prayer to make it come true, as the crack of stone on stone went caroming louder and louder round the sinkhole.

Reaching the bottom of the hole, Daniel shone the light from his phone screen over the stream, splashing over the slippery stones, hoping it might show somewhere to hide.

He found an opening into which the water vanished, cut into the bottom of the rock wall and framed by an overhang. Daniel crouched, breathless, and shone the phone, lighting up a narrow gully down which the stream ran into a chamber of sorts, but how big he could not easily see.

For a moment, all he could think about was his father as the huge pillars of black rock began to collapse like blocks of dark ice. He shouted above the great tearing and rumbling sounds that he was going to come back, and then rocks were bullocking down the slope towards him, leaving him no choice but to turn and slide head first into the gap in the wall. He held the phone aloft like a lantern, its light skittering madly as he wriggled like an eel in the wet flue, trying to slip his shoulders through.

Stones thumped the soles of his trainers and Daniel struggled harder, the water splashing up into his face and the cold iron smell of it making him gasp.

He thought he would never move.

And then he did . . .

. . . just as the light from the phone screen went out, leaving only the sounds of the water and the rubble crashing into the wall behind him as he slipped down the smooth, ancient gully into the dark, the fingers of his free hand bobbling over rock and trying to grab hold, the nails burning at their nubs.