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opening extract from

Girls to Total Goddesses

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Chapter 1

‘Right,’ said Chloe. ‘When are we going to start our makeovers and transform ourselves into goddesses?’ We were snuggling in the warmth of the Dolphin Cafe, one foggy afternoon in November. We’d been busy with school stuff for weeks, so we’d had to put the goddess project on hold. Further delay could prove disastrous, however: I felt we were beginning to drift.

‘Right now!’ I insisted. ‘We’ve got to get started! Remember what we said back in the summer? Girls to goddesses in seven days. Anyway, I have to be irresistible by eight o’clock tonight.’

‘Eight o’clock? What’s happening at eight o’clock? You never mentioned anything.’ Chloe’s eyes widened excitedly.

‘Who knows?’ I smiled mysteriously. ‘Once we’re goddesses, the sky’s the limit!’ I had slightly randomly fixed on eight o’clock as a time for our new lives to begin. Eight sounds so much more major and exciting than seven, come to think of it. Maybe it should be girls to goddesses in eight days: we might need an extra day to complete our transformation.

‘So where do we start?’ Chloe whipped out her notebook and wrote the words *GODDESS PROJECT* at the top of a page.

‘Well,’ I mused, staring into the muddy remains of my hot chocolate, ‘I’ve got to transform myself. I mean, you’re amazing, you’re totally cool and stuff, but I’m just hideous from head to toe! My hair’s like wire, my nose is a turnip, my teeth are too big, I have the largest spot in the history of acne . . .’ (Nigel, incidentally – he’s such a big presence in my life, he’s become more of a pet than a blemish) ‘. . . my tum is like an air bag, my legs are fat, I’m knock-kneed and pigeon-toed . . . I come flubbering out of bed in the morning like a Thing from the Bottom of the Sea, all slime and tentacles.’

‘Stop! Stop!’ laughed Chloe. ‘Zoe, don’t be stupid! You’re gorgeous! You’ve got an hourglass figure to die for, your hair is crinkly and all glittery and

bronzy, your eyelashes are huge, your legs are endless, you're tall and commanding and amazing and funny. I'm the one who needs a transformation!'

'No!' I protested. 'That's rubbish!'

'Listen!' insisted Chloe. 'I'm basically a dwarf, I have no boobs – they're smaller than your average walnuts, my hair is dry and demented and worst of all horribly, horribly RED and clashes with everything, my skin is the colour of porridge and covered with horrendous freckles, so I look like a goddam TOAD, plus the moment I go into the sun I get barbecued – oh, and my legs! Hideous and stringy! My shinbones are so sharp, you could cut cheese with them! Nobody is ever going to want to marry me!'

'Yes, they are!' I told her. 'You're a perfect petite size 8, for God's sake! Your hair is a divine red cloud! Your skin is like flawless snow and totally without polar bears' footprints! Next time they make a film about Queen Elizabeth I, Cate Blanchett will be out of a job!'

At this point Maria, who owns the cafe, came up and asked us to keep the noise down. 'You're disturbing other customers,' she hissed in a surly manner. Although she is basically a tyrant obsessed with men, we have to keep on the right side of her

because the Dolphin Cafe is the place to be. Our mate Toby was a waiter here back in the summer hols, and he told us that Maria let him kiss her in the pantry on Thursdays.

‘So where do we start?’ whispered Chloe.

‘It’s got to be exercise,’ I said determinedly. ‘Because I can’t give up on food. Not yet. And apparently exercise improves brain function, too.’

‘Yes! Yes!’ Chloe nodded, writing down *EXCERSISE*. Her spelling’s not brilliant, but she can do amazing sums in her head. ‘Exercise is a great idea! Maybe I can find an exercise to develop my boobs! And our skin will glow and our eyes will sparkle . . .’

‘With supernatural fire!’ I agreed. ‘But I’m not going to exercise *in public*. I don’t want anyone to see my flab flapping.’

‘Yeah!’ Chloe shuddered. ‘That would be weird!’ It certainly would be weird if Chloe’s flab flapped, because she basically has about as much cellulite as a pixie. ‘Also I don’t want anything to do with ball games!’ she added. Chloe’s wonderfully uncoordinated in a hilarious kind of way. I hope she never has to meet the Queen, because her curtsy would probably end up as a kind of headbutt and Chloe might get arrested.

‘No, no,’ I agreed. ‘No ball games, no team games.’

‘I hate team games,’ sighed Chloe. ‘People always think I’m the nerd.’

‘You are so not the nerd!’ I whispered indignantly. ‘I’m the nerd! Whenever I try sports, my thighs kind of stick together. I hate team games anyway, except when played by gorgeous men with rippling torsos.’

‘Oh yeah!’ smiled Chloe. ‘Remember that beach rugby in Newquay?’

Remember it? Little did Chloe know that approximately every five minutes ever since, I’d thought wistfully of Beast racing across the sands. God, he was such a legend! I remembered how his black curls had danced in the sea breeze, and his grey-green eyes always seemed so restless and interested in everything. School had become a deserted dungeon since he’d left. There was no longer any chance that I’d bump into him in the corridor, and now I was tragically haunted by all the places where I’d bumped into him last year, when I hadn’t even realised how fabulous he was, so it had been a total waste of bumpingness.

‘What are you thinking about?’ asked Chloe sharply. I had clearly started to wear a foolish faraway

grin. I hadn't told her I was mad about Beast, because it was a slightly dodgy subject: Chloe had been mad about Beast herself, all last term, before the summer hols. I'd have to get round to telling her soon, when I thought she could cope with it.

'Nothing, nothing.' I shook myself out of my reverie. 'I'm just thinking how wonderful it'll be to get fit. So when do we start the exercise? And it can't be jogging. You can get something called "Jogger's Nipple" and I'd die rather than have to go and see the doctor about that!'

'Aerobics!' yelled Chloe. People at nearby tables looked startled.

'Sssssh!' I warned. Thank goodness Maria was in the kitchen.

'We can get a DVD and do it secretly at home!' whispered Chloe. 'If we did it every day, would we start to see results in seven days?'

'Of course!' I was wondering how Beast would react to a new, slim, fit me. 'We'd start seeing results from Day One! And we can take photos of ourselves before we start, and once we've transformed ourselves we can take After Photos. And we must be totally honest with each other about what we look like.'

‘Yeah,’ agreed Chloe. ‘In fact, we must be honest with each other about everything.’ I gulped guiltily here, because of Chloe being in the dark about my feelings for Beast.

‘We need a deadline,’ I suggested, because I wanted to steer the conversation away from honesty. ‘You know, a big event we can prepare for, so we’ll have to be amazing by then. Hey! How about Jailhouse Rock?’

Jailhouse Rock was this amazing rock concert Beast was helping to organise, scheduled to take place in about four weeks’ time in the Sir George Plunkett Memorial Concert Bowl, known to one and all as Plunkett. It was being organised *by* Young People *for* Young People, in aid of Amnesty International (hence the name Jailhouse Rock – because Amnesty supports prisoners all over the world who are unjustly in jail only for speaking out against bad governments).

‘Jailhouse Rock!’ exclaimed Chloe. ‘Perfect! We have to be there anyway. We’ll arrive looking like a million dollars.’

‘We’ll blow everybody away.’ I nodded. I was secretly wondering how much of a transformation I’d need to undergo to blow Beast away. The trouble was, once upon a time, he had actually asked me

out – back in the grim old dark ages when I’d hated him, and I’d told him I wouldn’t go out with him if he was the last man left alive.

And though he’d been polite since then, whenever we’d met, I realised that he was never going to refer to it ever again: the whole episode had been hastily wiped from his memory banks. I felt sure he wouldn’t ask me out again if *I* was the last *girl* left alive. We were going to remain on chilly but polite terms until the end of time – unless I managed to transform myself into such a goddess that he would completely lose control, forget about the past, and throw himself at me at a hundred and seventy miles per hour.

Chloe doodled on the margins of her notebook. She drew a massive pair of goddess-like eyes. Maria arrived at our table and pointedly took away our empty mugs. We were going to have to queue for some new snacks or vacate our snug little corner.

‘Anything else you think we should put on this list? As in, kind of basic principles?’ I asked. ‘I mean, I’ve not really done enough research into goddesses . . .’

‘Oh, only that boys are going to be totally off the map!’ said Chloe firmly. ‘No crushes, no falling head over heels, not even a piddling little minor half-

hearted moment of fancying a guy until we've transformed into goddesses, OK? We've wasted so much time thinking about boys in the past! From now on, we won't even notice if Ben Jones sits next to us in the canteen!

'Ben Jones?' I asked playfully. 'Who's he?' Ben Jones is the school dreamboat, the male equivalent of eye candy, and normally I'd be quite happy to join in a bit of drooling over him, even though, of course, since I'd secretly become obsessed with Beast, nobody else was even slightly interesting.

'So boys are *out!*' insisted Chloe.

'Absolutely!' I agreed, secretly indulging myself in a little tiny thought about Beast's lovely strong masculine hands. 'But, Chloe – what if . . . ?'

In a sudden feverish fantasy, Beast turned up on my doorstep, just like he had last summer, and asked me out. And this time I didn't tell him to get lost . . .

'No what ifs!' insisted Chloe. She can be so headstrong at times. 'Boys are off the menu while we concentrate on ourselves. It's pathetic to measure ourselves by our success with boys anyway. We should be powerful, independent females in our own right – right?'

I nodded, trying to look powerful and independent

but secretly promising myself a tiny little indulgent thought about Beast as soon as Chloe got distracted by something. Maybe in a minute she would decide she wanted a Dolphin Cafe brownie or cinnamon toast.

A shadow fell across our table. We looked up. A pale, pasty boy stood there with beige slicked-back hair and khaki eyes. Oh God! It was Matthew Kesterton. If we wanted to be completely indifferent to boys, Matthew was the perfect candidate to begin our project. We'd got to know him a few months ago in circumstances too embarrassing to explain here. Oh, all right then: we'd pretended to be life coaches and Matthew had been our only client. He was basically the kind of guy who gets the Nobel Prize for Nerdhood. I had wasted a whole afternoon of my life trying to teach him how to smile.

'Hi, gels,' he said in a faux South London accent. 'May I join you?' And his lips twitched upwards in a kind of snarl of agony. I could see he still hadn't got the hang of smiling.