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Opening extract from
Call the Shots

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CALL

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CHAPTER ONE

I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER

“It’s my best idea yet.” Coop’s got a huge grin on his face as he wrestles his ice skate onto his left foot. “It came to me last night while I was launching a mud missile.”

“Oh God, here we go again.” Matt rolls his eyes as he pulls the blue plastic skate-guards off his blades. “It’s like a recurring nightmare.”

“No, listen,” Coop insists. “This is the *one*. I’m telling you. It’s going to make us all obscenely rich.”

“Seeing a live naked girl last summer was ‘the *one*’.” I dig around in my backpack, searching for a pair of socks. “Playing in the Battle of the Bands was ‘the *one*’.” Instead of socks, I find one of Buttons’ fossilised hairballs, which I quickly chuck under the bench. “Every one is ‘the *one*’. Except that they never are.”

“How can you live with yourself, being so wrong all the time, dawg?” Coop says. “All of my plans have turned out for the best. Think about it for a second. When we saw a live naked girl, Matt got a girlfriend. When we played in the Battle of the Bands, I got a girlfriend. If you play your cards right, Sean-o, this could be the thing that finally gets *you* a girlfriend.”

The muscles in my jaw twitch. “I’ve *had* a girlfriend.”

“You know what I mean,” Coop says. “One who doesn’t look like a hobbit and who sticks around for more than a week.”

I flip him off. “Remind me again why we’re friends.”

Coop claps me hard on the shoulder and beams “Because I’m always thinking about how to make your life sweeter.”

I finally find the wadded-up socks at the bottom of my bag. I give them a quick sniff and recoil at the damp, woolly, urinal-cake stench of them.

Matt laughs at me. “Why do you always do that? You think this time they’re gonna smell like cinnamon?”

“I don’t know,” I say, my ears getting hot. “I smell things. It’s how I experience my world. Maybe I was a dog in a past life.”

As soon as the words spill from my mouth, I realise I’ve just set myself up. I brace myself for the barrage of butt-sniffing jokes from Coop but nothing comes.

Which is totally uncharacteristic. And can only mean that he must be über-focused on his new plan. Used to be that him being so excited about his ideas would get me going too, but I don’t know. As we’ve got older – and everyone but me has benefited from his insane schemes – I’ve found it harder and harder to take him seriously.

Of course, if I thought there was even the tiniest chance that this plan of Coop’s, whatever it might be, could actually make us rich, I would be on it like a parrot on a peanut. Because, as much as I hate to admit it, he’s right about my girlfriend situation. I *am* a lost cause. After Tianna broke up with me at the end of last summer, I’ve been on a starvation diet where girls are concerned. I could use any advantage I can get – and if that extra boost came from being a millionaire, I’d take it, despite what my mom says about the kinds of girls who like you for the size of your bank account instead of the size of your heart.

But it’s stupid to get hopeful, because all we ever get out of Coop’s schemes are headaches and heartbreaks. And that’s when things actually go well.

So life will just continue on as it is, with everyone else paired off.

Coop and Helen.

Matt and Val.

And me and my urinal-cake socks.

On the plus side, at least I don't have to spend the night with only our pack of foster animals for company. Love them as I do, they're a little boring in the conversation department.

"A movie," Coop announces, like me and Matt have been begging him to spill the beans. "That's the sitch this semest. We're going to make a cheap-ass horror film like *Psychopathic Anxiety*. Or *The Jersey Devil Assignment*. They shot those things for a few thousand bills and then sold them for megabucks. There's no reason we can't do exactly the same thing."

"I can think of a few thousand reasons right off the bat," I say, my feet feeling claustrophobic in my old, stiff hockey skates. "I mean, seriously. If there were awards for your dumb ideas, this one would win Best... Most... Dumbest."

"Ouch," Coop says flatly. "That stings, Sean. Too bad you don't know what the hell you're talking about. Because it's a *genius* idea. Case in point. Your favourite movie of all time. A little film called *El Mariachi*. Made for seven grand. Turned over two mil. And that was just in cinemas. That's not even counting the five trillion copies of the DVD you bought."

I blow a lip fart. "Whatever. Even if we knew the first thing about making a movie – which we don't

– where the hell are we going to find seven grand? Or *any* grand, for that matter? We might as well conjure up a million dollars and be done with it."

"It's not like I'm springing this on you uninformed," Coop says. "I researched filmmaking on the internet for almost an hour last night."

"A whole hour?" Matt says, sounding fake-impressed. "Why didn't you say so? This plan is obviously foolproof."

"Look." Coop starts pacing around, a little wobbly on his skates. "There are a ton of ways we can raise the cash. We get a bit here. A bit there. Family. Friends. Local businessmen. It'll be simp. You'll see."

The DJ turns on the music in the rink. It's a Justin Bieber ballad that's been everywhere lately. It's actually not a bad song. The lyrics are sort of catchy, really.

Coop turns on me, his eyes narrow. "You're tuggin' me, right? You don't actually know the words to this crap, do you?"

I clamp my mouth shut, suddenly aware that I've been singing along. "Uh... no. I just... no."

"Sean-o likes the Biebs!" Coop cracks up. "Now I totally understand why your sister's convinced you're gay."

I glare at him. "First of all, munch my left one, okay? And B, Cathy isn't *convinced* I'm gay. She *wants*

me to be gay. Because she thinks it'd be cool. There's a big difference."

"Okay, sure, fine. Whatever you say." Coop sighs and runs his hand through his hair, doing nothing to fix the hat head he's been rocking all day. "Anyway, as I was saying. We can raise the money for the movie. I mean, Christ, B&M Deli sponsors Little League baseball teams all the time. And what do they get for *that*? Their name spanked across the back of a uniform? A cheap-ass plastic trophy every few years? Big whoop. If our movie rakes in even one-quarter of the coin that that puddle of spooge *Psychopathic Anxiety* made, they'd never have to sell another pastrami-on-rye with a flaccid pickle spear ever again."

Matt shakes his head, tugging his pant leg down over his skate boot. "Please, count me out on this one, okay? I just want to have a normal, boring school semester for once."

Coop sighs. "I don't get you guys sometimes. This is the kind of thing that can separate us from the miserable masses. Don't you dawgs want to be in charge of your own destinies?"

"Tell me," I say, carefully untying the dog-chewed laces on my skates and pulling the tongue up and out to try and give my feet a little more breathing space. "What's Helen think of this 'genius plan'? She on board?"

Coop glances towards the rink, where the guy is finishing up resurfacing the ice. "I haven't told her yet. *Because*," he adds before Matt or I can interrupt, "I wanted to tell you guys first. But I'm sure she'll be all over it. She loves the movies. Why wouldn't she want to help make one?"

"And what about Val?" I ask Matt. "Think she'll go for it?"

Matt holds up his hands in surrender. "Like I said, I just want to have a nice, normal semester. I'm sure Val does too."

I flash a grin at Coop. "See?"

"Fine." Coop smashes his knit cap on his head. "But don't you two come squalling to me when I pull up to the car wash you're slaving at in my bitch-red Gullwing, blowing my schnoz with fifty-dollar bills and wiping my ass with hundreds."

"Why would you be wiping your butt at a car wash?" I ask.

Coop shakes his head. "I was being metaphorical."

Just then, I look up from adjusting my skates to see Val and Helen entering the arena.

"Okay," Coop says when he sees the girls. "Let's keep our movie plan on the q.t. for now. Until we have a few more details hammered out."

"Yeah, well." Matt shrugs. "Seeing as we're not

doing it, I don't see what there is to keep quiet about."

"I'm just saying." Coop keeps his voice low. "If the girls learn about it before we know exactly what kind of film we're going to make, they might have... *opinions*. And we don't want to have to make some gay-ass lovey-dovey chick flick. No offence, Sean."

"Just because I liked *Mamma Mia!* doesn't mean I like all chick flicks. And it certainly doesn't make me ga—"

"Hey, whatever." Coop shoots me with a finger pistol and winks. "We accept you for who you are, dude."

I look skyward as the girls approach.

"What's up?" Helen says, her white figure skates tied together and slung over her shoulder.

"Nothing much," Coop leaps in. "Just discussing how lame it is that we have to go back to school on Monday."

Helen's looking pretty cute in her powder-blue mittens and matching pom-pom hat. It used to be that she would only wear bulky clothes in various shades of grey. But ever since the Battle of the Bands, Helen's been trotting out the pastels in a big way. I just can't believe she and Coop are going out. After all he did so he wouldn't have to be her partner in Health class. Beefing her out of the library. Stealing

her combination so Prudence could ransack her locker. Filling out an application to try and get her to change schools. I don't get it. But that's Coop for you. Always landing on his feet.

"Yeah. Vacations always go so fast," Valerie says. "Hi, you." She leans over and gives Matt a kiss. Lucky jerk. I've had a crush on Val — with her long red hair, full lips and sexy French accent — ever since she moved here in seventh grade. I would have been totally pissed at Matt for dating her if I hadn't been going out with Tianna at the time.

As it is now, I'm just insanely envious.

"Have you guys been here long?" Helen asks, sliding her arm round Coop's waist.

"Not really. Maybe fifteen." On skates, Coop is several inches taller than Helen. He leans down, and the two of them start making out.

There's a twinge of something inside me as I watch them go at each other. Jealousy, for sure, but also... oh, gross. I quickly shift on the bench to try and staunch the rapid swelling in my pants. Jeez Louise. That is *not* cool. I really wish my body was a bit more selective sometimes.

I turn my head before anyone notices the flush in my cheeks. Pretend I'm looking to see if the gates to the ice rink are opened yet.

The rink guards have just finished putting out the orange traffic cones to cordon off the centre oval for people who want to practise their figure-skating moves.

A deep breath and I manage to regain control over my whacked-out hormones. I yank hard on my skate laces, and just like that, they snap in unison, causing both my clenched fists to punch me right in the mouth.

Coop splutters with laughter. “Dude, no need to beat yourself up. Things’ll turn around for you eventually.”

Perfect. This just gets better and better.

“Are you okay, Sean?” Helen says.

“Yeah. Sure. Fine.” I feel my throbbing lip with my tongue. There’s no taste of blood, so that’s one good thing. But the way this night is headed, I’m sure it’ll swell up to the size of a bratwurst.

I do some quick repair work, knotting up the broken laces, then stand and do a few deep knee-bends to limber up.

“You guys want to go get something to eat first?” Valerie lifts her chin towards the warm glow of the McDonald’s doors.

Matt, Coop and Helen say they’re up for some food, but I beg off using the pork chops I had for

dinner as an excuse. Really, I’d rather chew my own arm off right now than sit through half an hour of my friends making googly eyes at their girlfriends while they feed each other French fries. Besides, the smooth ice beckons.

Nobody puts up any arguments. No “Come on, Sean.” Or “Hang with us. You don’t have to eat anything.” Just a thumbs-up from Coop and a “Catch you later” from the others, before the four of them turn and head off without me. At least no one’s there to see me lip-sync the last few lines of the Justin Bieber song.