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Opening extract from
Falling

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Published by
Barrington Stoke Ltd

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For Caro, for falling in the best possible way

First published in 2013 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

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ISBN: 978-1-78112-207-5

Printed in China by Leo

Chapter 1

You're not supposed to kiss someone who ISN'T your boyfriend. It's pretty much the first rule of relationships. But that's what I did last night. It was an accident. Well, it was *sort of* an accident. I feel bad about it now, of course. The guy wasn't even all that good at kissing.

My best friend Tilly keeps going on about it. She started the minute she arrived at my house to get ready for the party. I can tell she feels I've let her down, and she's the one person in my life I never want to let down. I kind of wish I hadn't told her, but she'd have known something was wrong. Tilly can *always* tell when I'm lying – not like Cam.

Tilly's sitting in front of the mirror in my room as she does her hair. It looks messy and cool, and extra red today because she dyed it last night. "I just don't understand why you would do it, Anna!" she says, for the 17th time. "AND the night before you're planning to ... you know." She puts on some eyeliner in one smooth sweep. I've never been able to master that.

"I *told* you, Till," I say. "I don't know why I did it! I just ... did. Can we change the subject? And could I maybe get some mirror time? I don't want us to be late. Cam's already annoyed that I wouldn't go help him set up for the party." This isn't exactly true. My boyfriend Cam does not get annoyed with me or anyone else – ever. That's part of the reason everyone loves him so much. Cameron Field. Mr Nice Guy. The most popular boy in our year by miles.

I adjust the straps on my bikini before I put my top on. The bikini is very tiny and very pink. Cam loves it. Cam loves everything I wear because he is the perfect boyfriend. He has perfect teeth, the perfect body and perfect

manners when he speaks to my parents. They bloody love him. And his parents seem to love me. It's like they've all gone crazy and made up their minds that the two of us are going to get married one day or something.

The thought of getting married makes me want to scream. The thought of getting married to *Cam* makes me want to scream, bash my head against a wall and run in front of a truck. The weird thing is, I'm not even sure *why* I feel this way. And I can't tell anyone, because everyone thinks we're *perfect* together. Even Tilly. I guess that's why she's giving me such a hard time about that boy I pulled.

Tilly's right, of course. It's extra crappy to cheat on your boyfriend the night before you have sex for the first time. And tonight's the night. Cam insisted we wait for my 16th birthday, which was last week. We've been going out for nearly a year, so you'd think we'd have done it by now. But Cam's not like other boys.

I even had to talk Cam into having this party tonight. As soon as I heard his parents were going to London for the weekend I started working on him. It was the sex talk that broke him down, of course. I told him it'd be the first chance to do it after my birthday. He may be the perfect gentleman and everything, but he's still a *boy*.

Cam's so nervous about our first time. It's pretty sweet, really. I'm nervous too, but not for the same reasons as him. I'm worried he'll realise that this *isn't* my first time. Not even close.

I'm the worst girlfriend in the world.

At last Tilly lets me sit in front of the mirror. I try to get my boring hair to do something interesting, but in the end it just hangs there and looks brown. Sometimes I want to cut off all my hair and dye it like Tilly did last year. But I'd never be brave enough to do something like that. And I wouldn't want people to think I was ... like her.

I feel my face go red with shame, but Tilly's too busy fiddling with her nose ring to notice. But it's true. I wouldn't want people to think I'm gay. It's OK for Tilly – she's all cool and doesn't give a toss what anyone thinks. It's not like our school is full of gay kids or anything. There are maybe five or six kids who are 'out', and Tilly and Summer are the only girls.

I wasn't that surprised when Tilly told me she liked girls. It almost seemed like something I'd always known. It didn't change anything – not really. I'm always asking her if she fancies girls we see when we're out and about. And she always says no. But she's been acting weird for a while now. She's been distracted just like I am when there's a new boy I'm obsessed with. And now seems like the right time to nag her about it.

“So, Till,” I say. “When are you going to tell me about this secret crush you've got?”

“I don't know what you're talking about.” Tilly's busy doing up her Doc Martens, but she

blushes bright red and that's when I know for sure.

"Is it Summer? I bet it's Summer! Come on, you can tell me."

Tilly sighs and rolls her eyes. "Just because Summer is the only other lesbian at school, it doesn't mean I fancy her!"

"I know, I know. I just thought she might be your type, that's all."

She looks up at me. "Since when do you know my *type*?"

I shrug. "I think Summer's pretty cool. A little scary, but cool ... You know she'll be there tonight, right?" I can't keep the cheeky grin off my face. "So ... all I'm saying is, tonight would be the perfect time to tell your secret crush how you feel ... Because *everyone's* going to be there. And there will be plenty of booze so you don't need to be shy."

I think I might have gone too far. Tilly looks well pissed off, but then she smiles. "You are so

bloody annoying sometimes, Anna," she says. "You know that, right?"

I do know that. Still, it's not going to stop me from doing a little matchmaking at the party. Tilly just needs a little push in the right direction, that's all.

That's what best friends are for, right?