

# 1

“Come on Alex, I don’t wanna get stuck in traffic.”

Jessica pulled the belt across Alex’s lap and buckled her in before running back around and jumping in the driver’s seat. As soon as she was in she hit redial on the control panel connected to her phone.

“Guess what Jessica, at school today we-“

“Sorry Alex, I just gotta take this call.”

Alex waited as Jessica dialed and started back into talking with her friend Abby. Jessica was always talking to Abby. Today they were talking about a boy called Adam. They were often talking about Adam. Alex didn’t understand why they talked so much about boys, especially the boy Adam because it didn’t even sound like he was that nice to them. Alex found most of the boys in her class annoying because they always o tell Jessica.

“Hey Jessica - at school today something really funny happened.”

Jessica flicked her an annoyed glance in the rearview mirror. “Alex, seriously, I’m on the phone.” Then she was back to talking about how dumb Adam looked with his new haircut.

Alex turned her head and looked out the window. Jessica wasn’t as nice when she was on the phone with her friends, and she was always on the phone, even though she wasn’t supposed to be on the phone. She’d often heard her mum and dad talking about how they paid Jessica to be the nanny, not to be on her phone. Maybe she should tell them.

Staring at the trees overhead, Alex decided no, she probably shouldn’t do that. Jessica would get mad, and maybe even get fired. She really didn’t want another nanny. Jessica was all right.

The ride home wasn’t long, and they had soon pulled into the

driveway. Alex waved at Mick, the gardener as they waited for the gates to open. Then they were sweeping up the driveway to the large house.

Alex didn't really think of it as a big house, it was just her house. She had always lived there. But one of the girls at school had told the others that Alex lived in a 'mansion' and must be rich. For some reason that had made the other kids make fun of Alex even more.

Alex didn't mind too much. They were just dumb kids. That's what her dad had said. But, sometimes their games at lunch did look fun, even if there were too many boys involved.

As they were heading into the house, Jessica's phone chirped.

"Hang on Abby, the boss is calling."

Alex got excited.

"Hi Mrs Matthews."

Alex smiled as her mum's face popped up on Jessica's screen. She was her desk at work because Alex could see the large ugly blue painting behind her.

"Hi Jessica. Pick-up go well?"

"Yeah, all good."

"Hi mum!" Alex called, standing on tip-toe so her mum could see her as they walked into the kitchen. Jessica pulled away annoyed.

"Good. There are some leftovers in the fridge from last night. We're both working later than planned so can you stay on for a few hours and put Alex to bed?"

Alex's heart dropped and she pretended not to see as Jessica rolled her eyes out of sight of the camera.

"Yeah sure, no problem."

"Hey mum, guess what happened at school today! Josh and me were--"

"Hi darling. Sorry mummy's got to go. But, Jessica will be with you. I'll come kiss you goodnight when I get home."

And with that she was gone and Jessica was already back on her call with Abby. Apparently Abby didn't think Adam's hair looked too bad.

"Can I have something to eat?" Alex asked.

Jessica waved her hand at the fridge before wandering into the living room and turning on the television. Alex sighed. Once the TV came on Jessica didn't really like having Alex around. She got all crabby, which was weird because she liked watching TV and Alex didn't understand why doing something she liked would make her crabby.

Alex smiled as she pulled open the fridge. She thought crabby was a funny word, though she would never say it to Jessica. That would probably make her even more crabby, which made Alex think of Jessica turning into an angry crab and trying to talk on the phone and that made her giggle.

After grabbing an apple, Alex picked up her bag and went up to her bedroom.

She loved her bedroom. It was her favourite part in the house, especially the special seat by the large window that overlooked the backyard. Her mother had called it a 'love seat'. Alex thought that meant something else to adults but to her it was perfect because she really did love it. The sun would come in through the window and she could curl up there surrounded by cushions and play with her toys and read her books.

Alex threw her bag on her bed and went to her dolls house where Tabitha waited patiently.

"Did you have a good day, Tabitha?"

Her small doll smiled up at her.

"Yeah me too. You'll never guess what happened at school today. It was so funny."

Alex proceeded to tell Tabitha all about the funny way Josh had mimicked the teacher. They had even got told to quieten down which, in Alex's world, was pretty major.

"I bet mum and dad will think it's pretty funny. I can't wait to tell them."

Saying that made Alex a little sad as she remembered that her parents were working late again and that they wouldn't be home until late. Probably after she was asleep. She always tried to stay awake and wait for them, but her eyes would eventually start drooping and then she would fall asleep.

Alex went over and sat on the love seat and stared out the window, Tabitha clutched in her fist. From her perch, she could look over the backyard, and see the neighbours house behind hers. The two boys were playing in their treehouse. It looked like their mum had brought them an afternoon snack. It looked like fun.

Alex had often wondered what it would be like to have a brother or sister. She imagined that it would be pretty fun. Like having a Josh around all the time. Sometimes at night, when she was sure no one was watching, she would say a prayer that her mum might get pregnant, even though her mum had often said she "did *not* want to go

through *that* again." It was probably naughty to wish for something her mum didn't want, but Alex couldn't help it. The big house sometimes felt too big for a little girl like Alex, and maybe having someone else around would help fill up the space and not make the quiet corners so quiet anymore.

As she idly watched the neighbour boys wave sticks at each other, she noticed a flash of pink and yellow through the trees on the other side of the neighbours house. Alex squinted. That was new. There were shops on the street on the other side of the neighbours house. But, she didn't remember seeing anything pink out there before. It looked like some kind of colourful large box with some flashing lights, but the trees were blocking her view. She watched as the boys stopped their playing and ran around the front of their house. Probably to see what it was.

Alex wanted to see what it was too, so she went downstairs.

Jessica was talking to her other friend, Sam now, and the TV was playing some show about women with make-up that, in Alex's opinion, looked too thick.

For a moment Alex stood on the edge of the living room, looking at Jessica and the TV and trying to make a decision. She wanted to walk over to the shops but she also wasn't sure about interrupting Jessica. Fortunately, Jessica noticed her at that point and just waved her hand for her to go away as she continued talking about how she thought Abby might like Adam, which kind of annoyed her.

Alex turned and walked quietly away, pulled open the front door and crept out.

The walk around the corner to the shops didn't take long. Alex used to never be allowed to go on her own, which meant she never got to go, but now, occasionally, she had been allowed to the dairy to buy herself a treat. Or to play at the park, though she didn't like that because some older kids always hung out there and the boys had made fun of her once.

She walked past the Andersens house and the Guptas house. They were also large, but Alex didn't go to the same school as them so she never really got to know their children which Alex would have liked. Next to siblings, some friends to come over would have been the next best thing. Like Josh. It would be fun to play with him. Whenever she asked, however, Jessica and her parents would always say maybe some other time.

*'You can't always get what you want kiddo'* Jessica would say as she turned back to the TV. Alex thought this strange because she felt like she hardly ever caught what she wanted.

Alex turned the corner and walked past the small corner park. The teenagers were there like they always were, and Alex's heart began to beat a little faster. She kept her eyes on her feet, hoping they wouldn't notice her. Older kids were scary and these ones looked even scarier with their black clothes and black hair. A few of them even had some piercings in their noses and ears. They reminded Alex of the goblins in one of her favourite stories, something she would never tell them.

Thankfully they were too busy to notice the little girl hurrying past, eyes down, long brown hair hiding her face.

Alex let out her breath when she got past, and the teenagers were soon forgotten as looking up, she saw it.

At first she thought of ice-cream. Then she thought of marshmallows. Because that is what it looked like. Pink ice-cream with marshmallows.

The food truck had been decorated to look like swirls of ice-cream and marshmallows and frosting and lollies. The roof swirled up to three peaks of perfect looking frosting. On top of one was a bright red cherry. Next to the ice-cream was a cake with icing that looked rich and creamy and perfectly glossy. Bright coloured sprinkles decorated it. At first, Alex thought she was actually looking at a giant bowl of cake and ice-cream and frosting and all things amazing.

She had to blink a few times before she clicked that this was actually a food truck decorated to look like these things. Right below a plastic flow of dripping chocolate sauce was a window. In lights next to the window, and twinkling like each letter had a life of its own, were the words *'Yona's Tempting Treats'*. Alex felt her tummy growl and suddenly she was desperate to try some of Yona's treats.

Which was when she saw the line. Apparently half the community felt the same because there was a line of at least twenty people, most of them children and teenagers, waiting to be served.

Alex watched from across the street, wishing she had some money. From where she stood she could just see through the others to a glass cabinet set in the side of the truck and it was filled with some of the most amazing food Alex had ever seen. There were cupcakes with icing that seemed to flow into shapes and designs of all styles. One even had a tiny miniature castle perched on top. Then there were hot-dogs, except they weren't like any hot-dog Alex had ever seen. These

were hot-dogs where the sausage was chocolate and the bun was ice-cream and instead of ketchup, they dripped with some dark red, syrupy sauce. There were ice-cream cones that looked like pirates, and mini cakes that looked like dragons. She swallowed down the desperate need to try one of these.

She watched as one by one children walked away laughing, smiling. One boy she was convinced walked away with a mini-cake with a dog who tail was actually wagging.

Looking both ways, Alex crept closer.

Through the crowd she heard a happy, throaty laugh. She craned her neck and stood on tip-toes to see. She saw a glimpse of an old woman, leaning out of her small window handing down a blue ice-cream with a pirate ship perched on top to a small girl about Alex's age. The woman looked like she could be someone's grandmother, but her hair was a bright shade of orange. And she had the kindest smile that Alex thought she might ever have seen.

"There you go sweetie - now remember, if that pirate gives you any trouble, you just bite his head right off!" The little girl laughed as she was ushered away by her mother. Alex watched as they walked down the road,

Then Alex saw the prices. An ice-cream was only one dollar. A cake was two.

She immediately thought to the little stash of coins she had hidden in her doll's house in Tabitha's little chest. Four dollars. Which meant that she would be able to buy more than one thing!

But, would she be allowed? Her parents didn't like her eating too much sugar. But, surely this would be okay.

Alex watched as customer after customer went up to the window and received one of Yona's treats. A dog. Another pirate. A fairy on a flower. An eagle flying around an ice-cream mountain. Each time someone walked past her laughing Alex's tummy grumbled even more and her mouth got that funny feeling when she saw something she really wanted to eat.

The line finally began to dwindle, and Alex suddenly realised that it was getting late. Jessica would be looking for her, probably getting annoyed.

She turned to go but just as she turned away the old lady, who was handing out another one of her creations, caught her eye. She smiled at Alex and gave her a wink.

Alex wondered if the truck would be here tomorrow.

As if she had heard her thoughts, the lady called out, "All right my friends, we're nearly done for the day. But, I'll be back tomorrow."

Alex felt herself wanting to laugh.

Walking away Alex began to plan in her mind that tomorrow she would come back and get her hands of one of those pirate ships.

Yona handed the last of the cakes down to a little boy whose fingers were sticky. As she took the money, her eyes watched the little girl who had been standing alone across the road and was now walking back down the street.

"Sorry everyone, I'm all out now. But, I'll see you back here tomorrow."

There was a groan of disappointment from the few left waiting. Yona laughed and waved goodbye, her eyes never leaving the back of the little girl until she had disappeared around the corner.

Yona smiled to herself and shut the truck window.