

# Swapped by a Kiss

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## About the Book

*I wish I wasn't myself any more. I wish I was her. I wish I was Jo.*

Rachel hates her life. When her on/off boyfriend David goes to a music festival in England she decides to surprise him – but she gets a shock of her own. Not only does she find David kissing someone else, but it's their friend Jo! Super-lovely, super-loved, all-round-perfect Jo.

Rachel runs away, wishing she could leave her life behind – and she suddenly finds herself in Jo's body! Can she keep this swap a secret? Can she unravel what's really going on? Can she get to grips with Jo's out-of-control curly hair?

And if she discovers that being in someone else's shoes isn't all it's cracked up to be, can she ever be herself again?



**SWAPPED** by a **KISS**  
*Luisa Plaja*

RHCP DIGITAL

*To Rocco and Isabella*

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## THE KISS

I AM IN the doorway of a dance tent and my boyfriend is inside, kissing a girl who is not me.

And the freakiest thing is, I can't think of a single thing to say. This is really something, coming from me. (Or, you know, *not* coming from me.) I can curse in five different languages. Six, if you count British English as well as the regular American variety, which I pretty much have done ever since I met David.

I calculated this impressive total just yesterday at the airport, when Mom made me go through my entire multi-lingual dictionary of what she calls 'colourful language' under my breath. (OK, *mostly* under my breath.)

Also, you know, she didn't exactly *make* me drop the word-bombs - I mean, she didn't say, *Now, Rachel, if you could just be really rude to me before you leave for England, I'll get your father to give you a raise in your allowance when you get back.*

No, that didn't happen (and anyway, getting money out of Dad is pretty easy, for all kinds of majorly wrong reasons). Upsetting my mother was totally voluntary on my part, and not something I'm particularly proud of, even if she makes it her mission in life to drive me crazy.

But I'm way less proud of the way I'm *not* swearing at David, who drives me crazy in a different way. In a good way - usually. I was really looking forward to surprising him here too. I can't believe I'm the one who got the surprise.

Still, that's me. Rachel Glassman, seventeen years old, oversized, gothically inclined (though not an actual Goth - there's a difference) and eternally kind of doomed.

And I don't mean doomed in a deep and sparkly vampire-love sort of way, either. Right now I am definitely in a damp and muddy boyfriend-fail scenario. The only thing this situation has in common with vampire-love is the way it completely sucks.

Also, the only way this almost-deserted English festival ground could be any damper would be if it was officially in the ocean. The mud-splats on my black clothes camouflage me against the flaps of the tent doorway. My boots are so caked in mud that the silver caricature I drew of me and David on the side is fully obliterated. Yeah - ironic much?

Anyway, none of that is even the worst thing.

Because I'm standing here, all uncharacteristically quiet and non-cursing (and thinking about the *weather!*), and my friends haven't even noticed.

Yes, my *friends*. Both of them. I can only see the back of her right now, but I know who that girl is.

And that is the worst thing.

It's Jo.

*Jo.*

Insert curse-word here. Insert a whole stream of them, except I can't seem to do that right now.

I think the reason they don't see me isn't that I'm silent and match the tent. I think it's because they're so involved in each other. They're not kissing now - I only caught the end of the kiss, a tiny moment. (Enough.) But she's leaning her normal-sized body into him and he's not moving away. Her natural brown curls are everywhere, hiding David's face from me and cascading over her soft-looking powder-blue sweater.

That's what Jo's like. She's normal, natural and soft-looking, and liking her is effortless. Even the most evil girls in our school, Chelsea Cook and her clones, wanted to be



friends with her when she landed in the States last fall and descended on The Mill's junior class like some exotic, un-made-up British angel.

I knew back then that David wanted her. On Jo's first day he called her 'too cute', and it made me so jealous that I swear even my *hair* shone green. (Though my cheap black dye helped with that.) Yeah, David and Jo had some kind of instant British connection. (Or 'Limey connection', as I'd say if I was trying to annoy David, ever since he made the mistake of telling me that 'Limey' was some historical insult meaning 'British person'. Trying to annoy David used to be kind of a hobby.)

But then me and David got together and I stopped worrying about Jo, eventually. (I never really stopped the annoyance efforts, but David mostly shoots cool insults right back.)

I also thought Jo was pretty serious with Albie, her gonna-be rock-star boyfriend.

Well, clearly not.

Would this have happened if I'd got here even sooner? Or if David and I hadn't had that argument before he left for England?

Or was it always going to happen? Has it been going on for ages?

I stand there for about two more seconds, thinking, *It's OK. I've half expected something like this would happen for months - I'm ready. I can deal with it.*

And then I find myself thinking crazy thoughts instead. Wishing I was over there with him right now.

But not as me. As *her*.

*I wish I was Jo.*

Yeah, that would solve everything. I could be with David without even having to be me. People would stop looking at me that way - the way they have since seventh grade. Even Chelsea would begrudgingly kind-of-not-entirely-hate me. I'd make people laugh instead of scaring them with what David

calls my 'intense intensity'. I'd lose my history and my reputation. I'd lose my nagging mother. I wouldn't lose my father because there's nothing much to lose, but everything would be perfect. *I'd* be perfect.

I'd be Jo.

And I'd still have David.

It's a freaky thought.

I step back out of the tent. Everything blurs as I turn and run and run, through field after tent-filled field, past the security guards at the entrance, under the flapping banner that says ENCHANTMENT. The wilderness of the moor stretches out in front of me. I vaguely thought England would be some kind of ancient miniature village in the middle of a big pond, but I was wrong. The space here is vast.

I reach a group of grungy-looking people sitting in a circle, passing roll-ups and bottles around and laughing - obviously strays from the festival site. The view from here is amazing, right down onto the main stage, but I don't stop for long. The festival strays look up but don't say anything as I heave myself past them, panting from the uphill struggle. I am so not a runner. I'm oversized. I'm unfit. I'm nothing like Jo.

Just beyond the people there's some kind of stone structure and I collapse inside it. It looks like it used to be a house or maybe even a tiny castle, but now it's a crumbling mess. It looks how I feel.

*OK, that's it. I refuse to feel like this.*

I take a black Sharpie from my jacket pocket, where I always carry my drawing stuff. I scratch at the rubble, marking the outline of my enemies in the ancient stone. It's symbolic. I found out about sites like this in the teen witchcraft books I used to read. The books were really just fun, and kind of garbage. But who knows - maybe this time I'm going to unleash some long-buried mystical powers, the kind that Jo seems to think I already have. She once told me she'd seen a double-faced voodoo doll of herself in my

locker, but of course it was just a little statuette I'd brought in for my Still Life art elective. I joked for a while about having made it after her first day of school, after David called her 'too cute', but she looked so spooked that I spent ages reassuring her I'd never used it. Not long after that, I gave up trying to make fun of my feelings, or mentioning them at all. They're not so much a joking matter.

Part of the stone I touched crumbles and falls apart, and now I'm not even sure whether the girl I drew next to David was Jo - or me.

*If I was Jo, life would be better. Jo doesn't get all angry the way I do. Jo can do relationships.*

*If I was Jo, I wouldn't have to deal with Mom, and Dad would be completely out of my life, and Chelsea Cook wouldn't be a problem.*

*If I was Jo, I'd be normal-looking, I'd be easy-going, I'd be lovable.*

*If I was Jo, he'd still be with me.*

*I've had enough of being me.*

*I want to be Jo.*

I look up. The rest of my graffiti disintegrates slowly until it's dust; a pile of dust at my feet. I can't bring myself to care.

I wish I wasn't myself any more.

I wish I was *her*.

*I wish I was Jo.*

The sky goes dark.



## ENCHANTMENT

WE WERE IN the middle of an awesome date, me and David, when he first mentioned Enchantment. (Ingredients for the perfect date: *X-Men* off-shoot movie, popcorn, David's house, his family miles away. David. Me. Mix together, watch sparks fly, don't necessarily watch much movie.)

I was in a kind of trance when David started talking instead of kissing, so it took me a while to tune in to what he was saying.

'It's a pretty minor British music festival,' he explained. 'But Jo told me the other week that Madison Rat got a gig there.'

'Oh, right. Great,' I said, shifting a little, if we were going to talk now. During the movie I'd somehow ended up completely entwined with David on the couch, though I don't exactly remember half of it. The movie, or how I'd gotten so entangled.

Then he said he'd been dying to tell me something since late that morning, but first his family (that afternoon) and then an urgent need to kiss me (that evening) had got in the way. But here was the thing: a while ago he'd emailed a British music magazine and begged for a summer work placement, telling them he knew one of the bands playing at a minor British music festival, which he did. He knew Madison Rat, Jo's boyfriend Albie's band, who had been getting some international attention recently through online music sites. So the magazine had just contacted him and

offered him an internship – unpaid, four days in the summer (three at the festival and a setup day), blogging some band interviews and providing an in-depth piece on Madison Rat. He was going to be in England all summer anyway, like he was every year with his half-British family. It was perfect. He sounded really excited about it.

‘Loads of people are going. Albie’s whole family, for a start,’ he told me. ‘They’re dying to hear Madison Rat’s British debut.’

‘Can you imagine Tori in England?’ I laughed and did my impression of Tori Windsor. ‘*Like, omigod, everything here is so totally old.*’ I was supposed to like Tori because she was Albie’s sister, and also now Jo’s best friend, but it was hard to forgive the fact that she used to hang around with Chelsea Cook, the most popular and incredibly evil girl in school. Besides, Tori was also a total airhead.

David reached over and did something melty to my neck, possibly to shut me up. It worked. I gulped.

‘My family’s not going, though.’ His breath tickled me, made me shiver and crane closer to him. It never felt close enough.

‘I’ll be there by myself,’ he told my neck, his voice low and throaty. ‘I’ll borrow Dad’s one-man tent.’

I turned and kissed his shoulder blade, made him sigh, got my own back. He smelled like coconut soap and something else. Some extra, irresistible David ingredient.

He cleared his throat and continued. ‘But if Albie’s family are there, it will seem all respectable, you know. To other parent-types.’ I had an idea what David was going to say next, because I knew he was referring to my over-protective mother. (My father probably wouldn’t even notice I’d gone.)

‘So I was wondering . . .’ He nibbled my neck again. ‘You wanna come too?’ He took a breath, sat back and waited.

Oh, wow. Me and David? Alone? In a tent? For a whole weekend? I couldn’t think of anything I wanted more than

that. Well, maybe an end to inequality and social injustice worldwide. But, you know. It was a close thing.

It could never work, though. In fact, it was terrifying. I'd be blurting out undying love for him by the end of the first night, and that would so not be a good look for me.

I laughed nervously. 'England in August? Isn't it worse than that Forks place out of *Twilight*?'

David smiled. 'Yeah, it'll probably rain. It's a festival - it's practically a legal requirement. But it means you'll get to hear English people say things like "brolly" and "wellies".'

Oh, wow, that was tempting too. I loved British. I was learning it from David, and I spoke it at every opportunity.

'And what if my hay fever flares up with all that outdoorsy stuff?' David said. 'You can take my mind off it.'

He kissed me properly then, to demonstrate. It took my mind off the planet.

When we re-entered the earth's atmosphere he said, 'Actually, I'm sort of nervous about it, Ray. I really want it to go well.'

'It will. You'll be great - you rock.' I didn't mind saying things like that. But there was a whole lot of other stuff about my feelings for him - and about me - that I was too scared to say. This was one reason David and I were not the perfect couple, not like Jo and Albie. Jo didn't seem unsure of Albie at all, ever. There was no way either of those two kept stomach-churning secrets from each other.

I kissed David again, but he stopped quickly to tell me more. 'The festival's called Enchantment, Ray! It's exactly your cup of tea - or rather "non-fat mocha hold the sprinkles". You know, with all your witchcraft stuff.'

I laughed at the way he remembered the fake coffee order we'd invented in ninth grade, but I said, 'David, you know the Wicca thing was just something I loved reading about. But I love reading about everything.'

He shrugged.

‘Anyway, if I go to Europe, I want to see famous arty stuff, not muddy fields. Even ones with “brollies” and “wellies” in them. Plus, you know, Madison Rat? Not my thing. I like music to move mountains, not sulk around in the valleys complaining.’

He laughed at my joke but his eyes didn’t sparkle the way they usually did. I was totally talking myself out of going to the festival and he knew it.

‘Also, I have plans for the summer,’ I continued, wanting him to smile properly again. ‘I’m going to research a new heroine for when I finish the RachGrrl book. A Greek goddess or something.’

‘Oh. Cool.’ He looked genuinely pleased. David loves the fact that I write and draw graphic novels. A lot of it was his idea to start with, when he was trying to stop me getting into trouble for drawing graffiti at school. RachGrrl is a character we came up with together, loosely based on me.

‘Well, anyway, think about it, Ray. Oh yeah, and Jo’s probably going.’ He smiled. ‘To be with Albie.’

‘Yeah?’ OK, well, honestly? *That* didn’t help at all. In fact, I wished he hadn’t said it, even if he did add the last part. I’d never really gotten over the ‘too cute’ comment. I hated my raging jealousy but I couldn’t seem to stop it. Especially because it wasn’t founded on nothing. David liked Jo. It was obvious.

There was a commotion at the front door: David’s parents and little brother were back from the movies. David’s mom made a great show of clattering around outside before she came into the den to say hi, even though David and I were pretty much completely disentangled by then anyway. David’s British dad and American mom are both amazingly cool. David complains about them, but really he has no idea how terrible parents can be.

David had a chat with his mom where everything he said meant *Go away*, and everything she said implied, *We’re*

*back now so don't even think about it, son.* It could have been excruciating, but my thoughts were elsewhere.

I was thinking about Jo. The way David acted around her. He talked to her so easily – way more than I ever could. I was terrible at female friendships; I had been ever since seventh grade. I wasn't great at being friends with boys either, not platonic friends, anyway. Except David, who'd been my best friend since ninth grade and then thrillingly more-than-friends for the last few months.

But David was great with everyone. Especially girls. And especially Jo. I had trouble dealing with it, even though I knew she had a perfect relationship with someone else.

Then I thought about the festival. Jo would be there, and so would so many other girls. David would like them all, and smile at them all. He just would – it was what David did. So we wouldn't be alone at all. We'd be with *them* – Jo and all the girls – and I wouldn't be able to stand it. If he was going to flirt with other girls, I'd prefer not to know about it, to pretend it wasn't happening. There was no way I could accept David's invitation.

When his mom left the room, David kissed me but it wasn't the same. He clearly thought so too because he said, 'Sorry they're back already. I wish I had a car. And possibly also a driving licence. I wish we could go somewhere together, just you and me.' He wrapped his arms around me and kissed me deeper.

'Mmm,' I said, warming up a little after all. 'I mean, yeah. Me too.' God, yeah.

'So come to Enchantment.'

'Mmm? No. No, I can't go. I'm not going. Sorry.'

He shrugged and kept kissing me, acting like he understood, the way he almost always did, though I really didn't think he possibly could.

It was a week or so before we had the argument.





## JUDGEMENT

AFTER THE ARGUMENT, David went to England with his family for the summer. I didn't say goodbye before he left.

I threw myself into the graphic novel research and I did OK at first. It was pretty fun. I looked at Greek myths and found the perfect female god for my novel: Eris. Eris was the Goddess of Discord, kind of like the evil fairy in *Sleeping Beauty*, only cooler and way more powerful. In the myth, she didn't get invited to some lame wedding, so she got revenge by making three other goddesses fight over who was the best. They asked a mortal guy called Paris to decide, bribing him with various things, and he made a typical guy choice: he went after the promise of a really hot girl. This ended up bringing down the whole of Troy, his city. The whole Trojan War thing was because he'd thought with, you know, the wrong part of his anatomy.

Typical guy.

I respected Eris for highlighting guys' failings like that. Eris was definitely my kind of character. So I was ready to start my new novel, *ErisGrrl: Birth of a Female Superhero*. I thought I could even illustrate the Judgement of Paris story, but up to date and in high school, with those bitchy goddesses looking a lot like Chelsea Cook.

The trouble was, I couldn't seem to write about Eris at all. I couldn't concentrate because I was missing David too much. All my serious research faded into nothing as I doodled panel after panel depicting me and David as a

crusading duo, avenging social evils in high school. The strips always ended with the two of us together in a heart-shaped bubble.

I could *not* believe myself.

Then, a couple of days ago, Jo's best friend Tori, the sister of Albie 'Madison Rat' Windsor himself, called to say her mom was sick and did I want to go to the festival with her?

Well, she actually said all of the following, in very few breaths and in about two minutes flat:

Her mom had injured her leg playing croquet in their back yard (though Tori called it a 'lawn') and the doctor advised her to rest it as much as possible for at least a week. Tori's dad was going to stay and look after her, even though they were heartbroken about missing their son's British debut. But Tori said that Albie had totally put his foot down and insisted their olds shouldn't go; in fact he'd been saying this for the last few weeks anyway, and she absolutely agreed with him. After all, there was no way Tori's parents would be anything less than embarrassing at a music festival. I mean, I'd met them, right? Omigod! Besides, Tori had to prove she could go it alone. As she knew I knew, Tori was enrolled in a British school for part of the next semester and her parents had already made Albie move his pre-college internship so that he was close enough to visit with her. Now her olds were talking like they wanted to transfer *their* jobs to England as well. Which, Tori emphasized, was *totally not the point*.

Besides, it was unfair! Albie had already flown to England without parental supervision, to do some sightseeing with his band before the festival. Why were they fine with Albie travelling and not her, when she was only six months younger than her brother? Yes, *six months*, I'd heard her correctly. I knew about how Albie was adopted and she wasn't, right? Anyway, she was digressing . . . The point was I had to understand how wrong it was to have one rule for a boy and another for a girl, what with my feminist leanings or

whatever. And also her parents had to learn to let go, and this festival would be a good place to start.

At this point Tori paused for a moment and I rubbed my phone ear. Within seconds she'd started again.

So, but get this! Her twenty-year-old cousin Brad, who was studying in Britain and staying in his London apartment through the summer, would use one of the parental festival tickets and help Tori with British travel, accommodation, etc. (She did go into details - the 'etc.' there is mine.) But there was still one spare festival ticket, and Tori and her boyfriend Topher were so *over* that she couldn't ask *him*, but her dad knew for a fact that Tori's flight wasn't full and he desperately wanted *someone* to fly to Europe with Tori and make sure she met Brad at the correct terminal of the correct London airport. *As if* she couldn't do it alone! It was so annoying, but he was still her dad after all, and he might not let her go if she didn't find anyone to travel with and she couldn't think of anyone else to ask. She was dying to see her big brother and her BFF Josie - and, oh, wouldn't it be great for me to see David, and please please please would I consider getting a last-minute plane ticket and helping her out?

Then she took a really big breath and waited for me to speak. Her hopefulness bounced off the cell-phone masts and into my super-sore ear.

And, you know, much as I didn't want to sit with a style princess in the confined space of an airplane cabin - probably discussing shopping malls and the failings of preppy ex-boyfriends for six hours - it sounded kind of perfect. I could get away from Mom, whose ridiculous nagging had been getting steadily worse all summer. And Dad . . . Dad knew all about last-minute long-distance travel. I could easily get him to buy me a ticket for the same flight as Tori. We'd arrive in England before the festival officially started and I'd surprise David, who was sure to be there early too as he'd be dying for a break from the summer

vacation with his parents. He'd smile at me the way only he can. We'd fall into each other's arms and forget all about our stupid argument. I might even try to control my temper more next time.

After all, we'd had arguments like that a lot. There was no reason to think this one was any different.

Though, clearly, it was.



## THE ARGUMENT

IT WAS NEARLY the end of the semester and I'd just finished some comics I'd borrowed from David. They were all about a Batman offshoot called 'the Huntress'. She's fantastically tough and it's not even clear whether she's on the side of good or evil, but the main thing is that no one, but *no one*, messes with her.

I found David by his locker and handed the books back.

He flicked through the one on top and settled on a particularly ass-kicking, no-nonsense image. The artist was a woman, and the character didn't even have the exaggerated boy-fantasy curves and/or skin-tight outfit that would make any regular female overbalance with the weight of her boobs and/or contract cystitis mid-battle. She was just a woman. Awesome.

'She always reminds me of you,' David told me, and the look he gave me made my cheeks burn.

We made out for several minutes right there against the cold metal of his locker. I loved that he saw me that way. I'd worked hard at that image. No way would I ever let the world know what a super-softie I really am - not after what happened in seventh grade. Luckily David started at our school two years after that.

'I bet RachGrrl could fight Gotham's evil gangsters, just like the Huntress,' David continued when we finally paused. 'She's such a cool heroine.'

‘RachGrrl’s a *hero*,’ I said when I’d got my breath back. ‘A hero who happens to be female. And you know I don’t want to write about imaginary gangsters. I want to write about *real* evil. You know, like the oppression that goes on in high school.’ I gestured around us, although at that point the halls were just filled with zombie-like students, shuffling to class with blank expressions on their faces. Still, I guess zombies can be kind of oppressed. ‘Like how wrong it is that school is ruled by boys. Oh, and girls like Chelsea Cook, who are basically serving the boys.’

David smiled. He has this awesome smile, all dimples and wickedness like he’s laughing at you and telling you you’re special to him, all at the same time. It’s unnerving. It’s also unbelievably hot.

‘Why do you keep saying school’s ruled by boys? I think you rule way more than I do,’ he said. ‘No, actually, I think you chuffing *rule* full-stop.’

I melt inside when he talks like that, all ‘actually’ and ‘full-stop’, and that adorable British almost-cursing. In Britain they have about ten semi-bad words for every one of ours, and they all sound completely cute to my American ears.

I tried hard to focus on what he was saying instead of the way he said it. ‘Yeah, but you don’t even notice the injustice. Because you’re a boy. It’s different for you. You never have to worry about nineteenth-century concepts that still exist today, like “reputation”, and what people will say if you go out with loads of guys.’

He gave me a look.

I back-tracked, flustered. ‘Yeah, obviously, I mean *girls*. Because if you went out with guys, it would be a total problem with the jock boys that run the school, which is just so wrong.’ I nodded triumphantly. ‘You see what I mean? High school is full of injustice.’ It really is. I can’t stand that kind of thing, and I’ll fight it if I can.

Yeah, and I’ll especially fight Chelsea Cook.

David ran a hand down the side of my dress, which made me breathe in sharply. 'Don't you think RachGrrl needs a sidekick?' he asked.

I laughed, but only to steady my knees.

He let go of me - *aw!*- and clutched both hands to his chest. 'The wonderful, charming, supercool—'

I called him a few curse words - lightly, just to shut him up.

He grinned. 'Yeah, those sound like great sidekick names. Original. But how are you going to reach high-school girls if your comic's rated eighteen?'

I went to give him a shove but he caught my hand and held it, making my heart thump even faster than before. I tried to cover it up by grunting, 'Do you mean it's rated *R*, Limey Boy?'

'Call me *Dastard* Boy. It rhymes with one of the things you just called me anyway, and it sounds wicked.' His thumb stroked my palm. He looked at me so intensely that I shut my eyes for a second, but that just increased the whirling sensation. Did he know what he was doing to me? What he *always* did to me?

Of course he did. He was Dastard Boy.

He held my hand and talked about superheroes and sidekicks all the way to the cafeteria, and he was still talking as we sat down with our trays of lunch gloop.

In the distance I saw Jo and Albie weaving through the tables towards us. By their side was Albie's sister Tori, dressed like a Chelsea Cook clone.

I knew that, the minute they reached us, our *brilliant* graphic novel conversation would be over and David would start flirting with Tori, and probably also Jo. He couldn't seem to help himself around most girls. And most girls couldn't help themselves right back.

'Yeah, it's perfect!' David finished at last. 'RachGrrl and Dastard Boy, fighting injustice in high school!' He punched the air heroically and then looked at me solemnly, taking my

hand again. 'United in the lunch-room and in love,' he added.

'Jesus, David. Stop' - I thought of the British way of saying 'kidding around' - 'taking the piss, OK?'

'But I'm not,' David said simply. He noticed our friends and let go of my hand. He waved at them. 'Uh-oh, here come Lady Too-Cute, Sir Singalot and Maid of All Fashion.' He clearly meant Jo, Albie and Tori, in that order, and I tried to smile. He'd just said he was in love with me. Sort of.

He'd also called Jo 'too cute'. Again. And he'd dropped my hand.

They reached us, and David smiled a lot at Jo and Tori, laughed at stuff they said, totally turned towards them.

I kept quiet and tried not to stare at Albie's hand, which was clasping Jo's the whole time. Jo and Albie: the perfect couple. Albie didn't even seem to mind that David was flirting with Jo. He probably trusted Jo with his life.

David didn't reach for my hand again. He barely even looked at me. And I *did* mind. A lot. And I did not trust him. We were nothing like Jo and Albie. We were not the perfect couple.

After they left, David tried to put his arm around me but it was too late. I'd crossed over to the dark side. I was angry. Huntress-angry, RachGrrl-angry, seeking revenge. As usual I couldn't even begin to tell David how I was feeling, or why. And, as usual, he either didn't notice or pretended he didn't. Which made it worse.

He moved his arm away, bit into his apple and said lightly, 'So, about RachGrrl! I was thinking, how about giving her a superpower?'

I was not in the mood for this at all. 'You know I don't go for that macho stuff,' I replied.

'It doesn't have to be macho. What about invisibility, or the ability to fly? Tinkerbell did it, and she wasn't exactly butch.' He shrugged. 'Or what about super-strength?'



‘RachGrrl should fight with her *words*,’ I said tightly. ‘I don’t want girls to think they have to fall in a vat of acid or be bitten by a spider before they can stand up for themselves.’

David absolutely wasn’t going to stop. ‘What about shape-shifting?’ He gripped his stomach. ‘Or the ability to eat school food without getting gas.’ He belched. ‘Super-gut.’

‘You’re disgusting.’

‘You’re right.’ He smiled. ‘Well, what about in real life? What superpower would you have? What if you could breathe fire? Or ice?’ He looked at me sideways. ‘Oh, wait, you’re already quite good at blowing hot and cold.’

I told him what I thought of that. I know I can be moody, but still. I did not appreciate David making fun of me when it was his fault I felt like this in the first place.

‘I’m kidding, Ray! Anyway, I know what power I’d want. I’d like to be an elemental. You know how I’m a total veggie nature-hugging freak’ – he was quoting me, trying to make me laugh – ‘but I can barely go outside in the summer because of my hay fever? Well, I could solve all that if I was an elemental who controls the weather, like Storm from the X-Men. Or I could just kind of rule over vegetation, like Swamp Thing.’

‘Figures,’ I said, wafting my hand around as if he smelled bad, although he totally didn’t. He smelled like David: kissable. Irresistible.

‘Yeah, and if I’m an *elementalist*, you could just be a *mentalist*.’ He laughed.

I repeated my complaint from before, but louder. If he’d been annoying before, he was really super-annoying now.

‘Hey, relax! I just meant you could have mental powers, like telekinesis or telepathy. You know, ESP and stuff.’

His eyes sparkled and I knew he didn’t mean that. He was the one who’d taught me what ‘mentalist’ meant in British. It meant ‘crazy’.