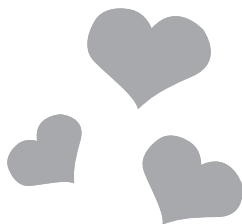


Chapter 1



“It’s sooooo unfair,” I moan, my head on Seth’s lap. We’re lying on Killiney Beach, our special place. Seth’s my boyfriend (I love saying that – boyfriend!), and it was on this very beach that I first noticed his amazing sky-blue eyes, not to mention his washboard stomach. His dog, Billy, is rolling around in the sand beside us, yapping happily.

Seth winds my hair round his fingers. “I know, but it’s only three weeks.”

“Only three weeks? A lot can happen in three weeks.”

We’ve only been together for nine weeks. So if you look at it that way, three weeks is a very long time. 33.3 (recurring) per cent of our relationship, to be exact. Sorry, I like maths. Geeky, I know, but a girl has to have her vices!

I'm off on holidays with my mad family – all of them. And when your parentals are divorced like mine, and both have new partners, that's a lot of people. Dave – my mum's boyfriend – has even invited his posh sister and her family along too.

The shared family holiday was Dad's idea. He claimed it would be a bonding experience for everyone after certain recent events – but it sounds like a nightmare to me. Luckily, Clover, my seventeen-year-old aunt, is coming along too. Otherwise I'd go mad.

And get this: while I'm stuck in Cork on the holiday from hell, Seth's off for three weeks to a big farmhouse just outside Rome. They're flying out this evening. His mum, Polly, is teaching photography at this arty-farty place that sounds like a weirdy commune to me – all hippy-dippy veggie food and workshops in connecting with your inner child. (Are they serious? Who'd want to do that?)

Seth is smiling down at me, his blond hair flopping over his eyes. There's a new smattering of cute sun freckles over the bridge of his nose. "I'll write to you," he says.

"Email, you mean."

"That too. But I meant pen and paper. Envelope, stamp, the works."

"Why would you do that? It's a lot of hassle. Do they even have post boxes in the wilds of Italia?"

He shrugs. "I like letters." The tops of his ears have flared a little and he looks away. "But email is fine," he says quietly.

Poor Seth, he's probably got his letters all planned out. He's a bit of a Boy Scout sometimes: likes to be prepared. Maybe he was thinking of sending me some sketches too. He's brilliant at art. And now I've gone and squashed his idea.

"No, you're right," I say. "Let's write proper letters."

"Cool." He stops for a moment before adding, "As long as you can read my handwriting." His mouth twists a little. "And I can't spell, either."

I've been wondering about this for a while. His texts are full of spelling mistakes. "Are you dyslexic?" I ask.

He shrugs. "I guess. I went to this psychologist, and I had to have extra reading and spelling classes in primary school, but Mum doesn't want to make a big deal of it. I wanted to drop out of Irish, but she wouldn't let me. You need it to work for RTÉ. She rang and asked them."

"RTÉ?" (Radio Telefís Éireann is Ireland's national telly and radio station. Like the BBC.) "You want to be an actor?" I grab a piece of driftwood and start singing "Summer Nights" into it. The school drama club are doing *Grease* in September. Me and Mills are determined to be in it, mainly 'cos it means: one, skipping a double Irish class on a Friday afternoon for rehearsals, and, two, meeting cute older boys. I have Seth, of course, but Mills is dying to meet someone, and she likes her boys "mature".

Seth would make a brilliant Danny if only I could persuade him to audition. He's not exactly Mr School and barely goes to all his classes as it is. I can see him now, though, up on the stage, hair slicked back, leather jacket, tight black jeans, his slim hips wiggling – oh baby!

“Earth calling Amy; come in, Amy.” Seth is staring at me.

My eyes are resting on his hips and I drag them away. How embarrassing! I cover my pink cheeks with my hands. “I think I’ve had a bit too much sun,” I say. “Sorry, what were you saying about the telly?”

“Radio. I want to work in radio.”

“As a DJ?”

“No. Behind the scenes. Production or research.”

Just then my mobile beeps. I read the text message: AMY, HOME NOW! U MUST PACK. R U STILL AT CLOVER’S? UR MOTHER!

“Oops,” I say, climbing to my feet and brushing sand off my bum. I haven’t even been to Clover’s yet.

Seth puts his arms round my waist and tries to pull me back down on to the sand.

I shriek. “Unhand me, Crazy Horse.” Our history teacher is obsessed with Native Americans; it must be rubbing off.

“It’ll cost you, my little Indian brave.” He grins up at me. “A kiss.”

My tummy does a flip. Clover’s comprehensive kissing lessons are certainly coming in useful. He loosens his grip on my waist. I put one leg on either side of his and sit on his lap; then, leaning forwards, I tilt my head a little. Our lips connect. *Zing!* There goes the electricity again, radiating out from my lips; within seconds, my whole body feels tingly. I open my mouth a bit and feel the warm tip of his tongue against mine. Then—

Yap, yap, yap. Billy barks in my ear and jumps on my back.

I break away from Seth, startled. "Ow." I rub my skin through my T-shirt. He has sharp claws.

"Bad dog," Seth tells Billy, pulling him away from me by his collar. I give my mouth a quick wipe with the back of my hand.

When Billy has finally calmed down, Seth says, "Sorry about that. I don't know what's wrong with him today."

My mobile starts to ring. It's Mum. Double oops.

"Angry parental alert. I really have to skedaddle. I'll text you the address of the holiday house. And the landline." I groan. "Two weeks of hell."

He shrugs. "It might be fun."

I pull a face. "Yeah, right. But at least Clover's going – that's something."

Seth grins. "She's a bad influence. Stay out of jail. And Amy?"

"Yes?"

"I'll miss you."