

Jelly

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Chapter 1

‘Do it now, Jelly! Please!’

‘All right,’ I say, ‘but check the door for Mr Lenck.’

My friend Kayma scuttles to the open classroom door and sticks her head out into the corridor. ‘No sign,’ she says. ‘Quick!’

I take a deep breath and pull myself up very straight. My friends start to giggle because they know what’s coming next, and a ripple of interest spreads across the rest of the class. People turn mid-conversation, and their eyes light up when they see me standing by my chair. Everyone knows what I can do.

I walk very carefully and precisely over to the teacher’s desk at the front of the room, turning

in my toes. Then I whip round, look out over the classroom, and sniff slightly. There's another burst of giggling. I snap my head to the right and say, making my voice as nasal as possible, 'Marshall, I don't know *what* you think you're doing.'

The class, including Marshall, shrieks with laughter.

'It's your own time you're wasting,' I add, frowning sternly at him.

More laughter. Marshall guffaws so hard he bends forward over his table.

I roll my eyes to the ceiling, with its square panels and long rectangular lights, and say, 'Sometimes I don't know *why* I bother.'

The giggles are suddenly silenced, and I know what *that* means.

A nasal voice behind me says, 'Angelica Waters, I don't know *what* you think you're doing.' The voice belongs to Mr Lenck, our teacher, and its tone and inflections are almost exactly the same as my impression.

I turn to smile widely at him. 'Oh, hello, Mr Lenck. Did you have a nice lunch?'

Mr Lenck rolls his eyes to the ceiling, just as I did a moment earlier, sighs and says, 'It's in one ear and

out the other with you, Angelica, isn't it?'

'Sorry, Mr Lenck,' I say. 'It's a compliment really.'

'Doing impressions of your teachers is a *compliment*?' Mr Lenck repeats, raising his eyebrows.

'You're so expressive,' I explain. 'And you have really good catchphrases.'

The corner of Mr Lenck's mouth twitches. Teachers can never stay cross with me for long. It's not exactly *rude*, what I do. It's funny. Even Mr Lenck finds it hard not to laugh when I do Mr Harding, the caretaker. 'Sit down,' is all he says now.

He starts taking the register, and I sit back down next to my two best friends, Kayma and Sanvi. Kayma, her long braids swinging forward into her face, gives me the thumbs-up. Sanvi smiles at me, but in a sort of half-admiring, half-appalled kind of way. She has big brown eyes that go very wide when I do something risky. Out of the three of us, Sanvi is the goody-goody, the one who always gets house points. Her family's quite strict, so she always does what she's told.

Once registration is over, we go into the hall for assembly. I prepare to be bored, but Mrs Belize, the

head, has an announcement. ‘As most of you know, we always have a talent show at the end of the summer term.’ She pauses dramatically and then says, with jazz hands: ‘The K Factor!’

A murmur of excitement goes through the kids squashed cross-legged on the floor. K stands for Kingswood, the name of our school. Anyone can enter, and if you win, you get your name on The K Factor trophy, which stands in the cabinet by the school office.

I’ve entered every single year but never won it. Last year I did a comedy sketch with Kayma and Sanvi and we came third. But I’ve been getting better and better at impressions, and everyone loves them. This could be my year.

Mrs Belize goes on: ‘This morning’s assembly is about famous performers and the things they’ve done. And the added bonus is . . . they’re all children!’

The projection screen rolls down, and she starts showing us videos of kids from around the world doing amazing things, like playing the piano with their feet, or doing twenty backflips in a row, or building a tower of forty-three Polo mints. ‘Now,’ says Mrs Belize as the presentation ends, ‘I’m not

saying we've got the next Mozart at Kingswood. Or the next Harry Potter. Yes, Angelica?'

My hand has shot up. 'Mrs Belize,' I say kindly, 'you do know Harry Potter isn't real, right?'

The whole school laughs, and my heart thrills at the sound.

'Not real?' Mrs Belize pretends to be shocked. Then her voice changes tone. 'Thank you, Angelica, trust you to point that out. I was meaning, of course, that maybe some of you can do magic tricks, or perhaps – yes, Angelica?'

'Is flying on a broom allowed in school?' I ask politely.

'If you're able to pull that off, Angelica, we'll all be very impressed,' says Mrs Belize drily. 'Now, the auditions aren't for several weeks, but I know some of you like lots of time to plan your acts, maybe writing scripts, rehearsing or finding time outside school to practise with your friends. And as usual, we'll have a special guest judge for the finals!'

She makes this sound very exciting, but we all know that the special guest judge is usually her daughter Julie who once had a part in *EastEnders*. We're not supposed to talk as we file out of the hall, but of course everyone is whispering to each other.

‘You so have to do your impressions,’ Kayma hisses at me. ‘Mr Harding, for one. And Mr Lenck.’

Sanvi whispers from behind. ‘Is that really a good idea? I mean, don’t you think people will mind if Jelly does impressions of them?’

‘Course not.’ Kayma waves away this suggestion. ‘And if they do, who cares? We’re leaving at the end of this term!’

Sanvi lapses into appalled silence.

‘Thing is,’ Kayma says in a normal tone as we head down the corridor, ‘what are *we* going to do? Me and Sanvi?’

‘We can’t do comedy sketches without Jelly,’ Sanvi breaks in. ‘We’re not funny enough.’

‘Speak for yourself,’ Kayma retorts. ‘I’m *hilarious*, I am.’

I laugh. ‘I’ll help you figure out what to do. There’s loads of time.’

‘Maybe I could be a magician sawing Sanvi in half,’ Kayma mutters as we enter the classroom.

As we settle into afternoon lessons, I am buzzing inside. I love performing. And here’s my chance to do the thing I’m best at – the thing everyone loves about me – onstage, in front of an audience! I can’t *wait*.