

MATES, CHAOS, LOVE, Adventure!

LOVE HA! HA! HA! LOVE LOVE CHOCOLATE THE DRIFTING OUCH!

I LOVE DANNY

ME

Suzy P

THE DRIFTING Let Me BITE

Meet Me at Botanicals with the girls & shared secrets

FRIZZ OFF Chase Away Those CURLS



ZACH?

THE DRIFTING ROCK!

Karen Saunders

'A hugely entertaining read.' Cathy Hopkins, author of Million Dollar Mates



Karen Saunders  
xxx



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For my wonderful Mum.  
With love, always.



# CHAPTER ONE

oh no, oh no, oh no... I can't *believe* I'm so late.

How can I be out of breath this flipping quickly? I am seriously, seriously unfit. And these new shoes aren't helping. They may look great, but they sure aren't easy to move in at speed.

In my jacket pocket, my mobile vibrates for the bazillionth time. I don't need to check it, because I know exactly who it is. It'll be my best friend, Millie, asking yet again:

**Where r u??!!!**

Like I have time to reply.

Besides, doesn't she know I'm moving as fast as I can?

I feel majorly guilty because I promised Danny that nothing short of a meteor decimating the school would make me miss his football match. As a loyal girlfriend, of course I'd be there to support him. He said he'd do



a lap of the pitch in the buff if I actually made it in time for kick-off.

*Tsch.* Anyone would think I had a reputation for being late or something. Which, actually, now I think about it... I suppose I kind of do.

But this time, it totally wasn't my fault. Miss Evans, our über-anal maths teacher, went all CSI on us after a school protractor went missing. Like anybody would *seriously* steal one. It was only after a full-scale investigation verging on fingerprinting and waterboarding that it was discovered she'd counted wrongly, but by then it was twenty minutes after the bell. I had to go to my locker and dump my stuff, then I needed the toilet, then I went back to my locker because I'd forgotten my English reading, then I bumped into my science partner, Rachel, who waffled on for ages about our photosynthesis homework and made me realise I needed to go back to my locker *again* for my science textbook, and, well... yes. I'm late.

Which is why I'm legging it through the school, risking life and limb to get to the football field as quickly as humanly possible.

This match is pretty big deal to Danny. The fact he's only been picked because of a clash with the French exchange – meaning most of the regular squad are currently larging it



up in Paris – means nothing. As Danny’s told me proudly, and practically hourly over the last few days, he’s never played for any sports team before. Ever. And this isn’t just any old match. It’s the quarter-final of the regional cup.

Secretly I think Mr Barnes, one of the PE teachers, might have been desperate to make up the numbers. I’m not being mean. I’m really not. But since Danny’s major growth spurt, any vague coordination he might once have had has totally disappeared. It’s like he doesn’t know how his arms and legs work any more. And football’s never been a strong point. I don’t think he’s ever kicked a ball straight in his life, so let’s just say the England squad won’t be quaking in their boots anytime soon.

But I should still be there to show my support. That’s what girlfriends are supposed to do. Like those WAGS. They show up in their designer clothes and inches of make-up, look stunning and cheer on their menfolk.

And I’m sure I look stunning right now – not at all red-faced and flustered with my brown curly hair zinging all over the place like I’ve had an electric shock.

I stop for a rest, but when I check my watch I let out a tiny yelp of horror.

Nearly half four?! Gnargh, I am *so* late.

No time for stopping, then. I’ve got to keep going



and hope my lungs eventually forgive me. I'm now so short of breath I'm practically *wheezing*.

Trying to ignore the painful stitch in my side, I speed past the science blocks and veer onto the wet grass, squelching my way across the field. The pitch, not far away now, is at the bottom of a small, steep slope, and there's a crowd of spectators on the sidelines. Millie's down there somewhere because Jamie, her boyfriend, is playing today too. He's actually good at football, though, and one of the team regulars.

I hear a familiar scream, then a whooped cry of "Goooooo, Colinsbrooke, go, go, go!"

Oh-kaaay, so *that's* where Millie is. You can't exactly miss her, given she's leaping around like a hyperactive kangaroo, bellowing at the top of her voice. Her blonde hair, with its newly acquired purple streak, has been tied into wildly bouncing bunches, and she's found some pompoms from who-knows-where, apparently appointing herself cheerleader for our team. It never fails to amaze me how much energy Mills has. It's exhausting keeping up with her sometimes.

"Millie?"

"Give us a C... C! Give us an O... O! Give us an L..."

"Millie," I yell again, starting to jog down the slope.

“L! Oh, hi, Suzy. Where’ve you been? The game started forever ago,” Millie calls, shaking her pompoms vigorously. For such a tiny person (152 centimetres if she’s stretching), she sure is loud. As she bounces forwards towards the sidelines, I suddenly notice the person standing behind her.

Danny.

His face is downcast, his light brown hair is a mess, and his shoulders are slumped inside his muddy football shirt.

Huh? Danny’s meant to be playing, not watching. What’s happened?

Although... I don’t think I can worry about that right now. Because I’ve been so distracted looking at Danny, I’ve not realised just how slippery this grass is. I’m going a *teensy* bit faster than I feel comfortable with, and I don’t seem to be able to stop. My lovely new shoes don’t have any grip.

Okay. I’m all right. All I need to do is act calm, even though my legs are out of control and I’m careering along at a crazy speed. I’m cool and collected. Everything’s fine. Nothing to see here, people.

Oh help, this is not going to end well...

Everything spirals into slow motion when I reach the bottom of the hill, stumble onto a patch of mud, and

skid spectacularly towards the pitch. My arms windmill as I struggle to keep my balance, and just when I think things can't get any worse, I trip over someone's outstretched foot.

I can feel myself falling... falling...

In a final, desperate effort to prevent myself landing face first in the mud, I flail around frantically for something to grab hold of. Which, somewhat unfortunately, happens to be Ryan Henderson, our star player. He's got his back to me, and is about to take a corner. And as I hurtle downwards, my hands grab, well, erm, slightly *lower* than is ideal... onto the legs of Ryan's shorts.

As I crash to the ground, the shorts come with me.

A growing roar of laughter fills my ears. When I dare open my eyes, Ryan's standing over me in the geekiest pair of Bart Simpson tightie-whities I've *ever* seen.

O. M. G. Someonekillmedeadrightnow.

"Nice pants," shout several of Ryan's teammates, over a chorus of wolf-whistles, cheers and people singing *The Simpsons* theme tune. Someone else yells, "Now we know why you got changed in the bogs!"

"These were the only clean ones I had. Mum's away and Dad can't work the washing machine, all right?" Ryan mumbles, quickly hoisting his shorts and glowering at me with such hatred I practically shrivel on the spot.

"Suzy Puttock, get off the pitch this instant!" snaps

Mr Barnes. A pair of scruffy white trainers appear in my eye-line. “What the hell are you doing, young lady?”

I stare up at him pathetically. Given that I’m lying at his feet covered in mud, I’m not exactly in a strong position to make a case for my defence.

“You, madam, are the most disaster-prone individual I’ve ever had the misfortune to know,” Mr Barnes says. “Get out of my sight. Immediately.”

I’d love nothing more than to get out of here, but when I try and stand, I slide around all over the place. Yeeeeew! My hands are covered in gross, slimy mud.

Mr Barnes sighs deeply and reaches out his arm.

What? Oh, come on, you have *got* to be kidding me. I thought I’d hit the pinnacle of my humiliation, but it seems not. Now, on top of everything else, I’ve got to hold a teacher’s hand. And not just any teacher. This is skanky Mr Barnes, who honks of BO and has back hair that pokes out of the neck of his T-shirts. Gag.

I gingerly grab onto his fingers and try not to grimace too obviously as Mr Barnes hauls me to my feet. Once I’m safely vertical, I scuttle off through the crowd, refusing to make eye contact with anyone.

When I reach Millie and Danny, they’re leaning against each other, laughing like lunatics.

“Oh, stop, stop, my belly hurts,” Millie moans.

“*Simpsons* pants!” says Danny, and they’re off again. Millie’s actually got tears streaming down her cheeks.

It’s forever before they start to calm down.

“That’s cheered me right up,” Danny says, trying to compose himself.

“Why aren’t you playing, Danny?” I ask, refusing to acknowledge anything out of the ordinary ever happened.

“Suze, you’re hilarious, you know that?” He straightens his face hurriedly when he sees me scowling. “Not quite ready to see the funny side, huh?”

“Nuh-uh,” I say. “So are you going to tell me what happened?”

“Oh. Um. Well, I kind of... got sent off,” he says sheepishly.

“You what? How? What did you do?”

“There was a bit of a miskick...”

“A bit of a miskick?” Millie interrupts. “Danny, you scored two own goals and the rest of the lads decided they’d rather be a player down than keep you on the pitch.”

“Don’t listen to her,” Danny says, frowning. “Anyway, you should have been here to see for yourself. Now you’ve missed my one moment of sporting glory. There may never be another.”

“Evans kept us all back after class,” I explain. “I came as quickly as I could.”

“We noticed,” Millie says, making a strange snorty noise

as she struggles to hold back more giggles. Even Danny starts to smile again.

Hurrmph. Time to change the subject. Sharpish.

“What’s the score?” I ask, wincing as Ryan makes a particularly violent tackle and St Edward’s is awarded a penalty.

“Thirteen-nil to St Edward’s,” Danny replies. “No, wait... now it’s fourteen-nil. Our goalie’s glasses broke in the first ten minutes so he can’t see a thing. And Ryan appears to have gone into meltdown since the pants thing, which is thanks to you...” Danny grabs me in a headlock and rubs his knuckles across my scalp.

“Gerroff,” I say, trying to pull away, but admittedly not too hard. I’ve got to take affection where I can. Danny doesn’t really get how to demonstrate his feelings in public. Rubber-band fights, whacking my head with a ruler, pulling my hair – it’s all very juvenile and the way Danny shows he cares. Who said romance was dead, eh? Although I guess I should be used to it by now. I’ve known him long enough.

We’ve been mates with each other, and Millie and Jamie, since we were four. We were all at the same primary school, our parents became friends, and as a result we’ve been shoved together at family barbecues, birthdays and Christmas parties for as long as we can remember.

When we hit thirteen, Millie and Jamie used each other for kissing practice, then kind of hooked up, so Danny and I figured we'd get together too. It just made sense.

Danny's always been there for me. He came along to meet my newborn sister Harry in hospital and caught her as she tipped out of my arms (she still doesn't believe it was an accident). He hauled me out of the canal when I was practising cartwheels, aged eight, and got too close to the edge. Then there was the legendary Big Bicycle Crash the day after I got my new bike and wasn't too hot at the whole steering thing. We've both still got the scars – me on my left temple, Danny above his right eyebrow.

He is also the first person I ever kissed.

Actually, he is the *only* person I've ever kissed...

A huge cheer from the St Edward's supporters and the whistle blowing jolts my attention back to the game. St Edward's has scored yet another goal. Danny groans in agony as Millie bounces around encouragingly, but her enthusiasm's fading rapidly.

"Talk about a disaster," I say, hopping from foot to foot, trying to keep warm. "We're getting battered out there."

"Tell me about it," Millie says. "Jamie's going to be in a right mood after." She sighs heavily, but then her face brightens. "I know what I wanted to ask you. You guys around this weekend to come shopping? I need some

new boots, and *ta-daaaa*, oh yes, it's a miracle: Mum's actually given me some money."

"Count me out," Danny says quickly.

"That sounds great," I reply. And then I remember. "Oh no. Wait. I can't."

Millie frowns. "How come?"

"Amber and Mum are taking me to choose my bridesmaid's dress," I say gloomily.

"Ooh, new clothes," Millie says, rustling her pompoms in my face. "Sounds good to me. Do you know what you're getting? Something slinky and chic?"

"I wish." I grimace and push her away. A couple of the fronds have gone up my nose and now I want to sneeze.

"C'mon, it can't be that bad. It's still a new dress, right?"

"Er, you have met my sister before, yes?"

"Oh, right." Millie bites her lip. "How bad are we talking here?"

"The words 'lime' and 'green' have been mentioned."

Millie winces. "You're *kidding*."

"Wish I was. What normal human can wear lime green, for God's sake? It's all Conni G's fault. Her bridesmaids wore that colour, and you know how obsessed Amber is with all things Conni."



Conni G is one of those celebrities with gravity-defying breasts who is regularly photographed leaving nightclubs wearing teeny-tiny outfits, usually while sucking the face off a premier-league footballer. Amber worships her. But Amber has weird ideas about a lot of things. Half the time it's doubtful whether she even inhabits the same planet as the rest of us, but instead wafts around in Amber-land, a sparkly place filled with fluffy clouds, harp-playing kittens and candyfloss.

A while back, there was a brief second when I was excited at the thought of being her bridesmaid. But that was before I heard what Amber wanted me to wear. For a start, I don't do dresses. And the colours? Hot pink with lemon polka dots was the first suggestion, and that was horrifying enough, but even that would be better than lime blooming green. Conni G has a *lot* to answer for.

From the field comes several long whistle blasts, followed by a cheer from the opposition's crowd. The match is over and as the players troop off, all of our team, Mr Barnes included, glower in my direction.

"What a massacre," Jamie says as he joins us, pushing his dark fringe out of his eyes. Millie leans over gives him a kiss.

A proper one.

With tongues and everything.

I watch them wistfully, wishing, not for the first time,

that Danny didn't have such a complex about affection in public.

"Ahem." Danny coughs loudly and punches Jamie in the shoulder, proving my point.

Millie and Jamie pull apart and laugh.

"You okay?" Millie slides her arm around Jamie's waist.

"Not really. We were slaughtered out there. And you didn't help," Jamie says, before prodding my ribs with a grin. "Though at least you gave us a laugh. But, mate, seriously, what were you thinking?" His attention turns to Danny.

"Don't start," Danny says. "And it wasn't *all* my fault. The ref was totally biased towards the other team."

"You're not wrong. Did you see that goal he gave when the ball hadn't even crossed the line?" Jamie asks. As we trudge towards the school, the boys wander ahead, dissecting the match, kick by disastrous kick.

Millie opens a packet of jelly babies and gleefully chomps off an orange head.

"Want one?" she asks, mid-chew.

"Nah, thanks."

"Ooh, there's that new guy," Millie says, pointing at a figure with the ball tucked under his arm, dawdling behind the other players. "Have you seen him yet? Well



worth a squiz.”

“Where?” I stand on tiptoes at the exact moment the guy fumbles with the ball. It drops to the floor and bounces in our direction.

As he chases after it, I swallow. Hard.

How did I miss him on the field? He is seriously, *seriously* hot. He’s got tousled blondy-brown hair and amazingly chiselled features, like someone from a magazine. He’s tall, too, much taller than a lot of guys in our year. Plus I’ve never seen anyone look so sexy in our school PE kit.

The ball stops a short distance from us. The boy scoops it up, glances in our direction, and for a brief moment, our eyes meet. A crackle of electricity surges through me, leaving me all kinds of tingly.

Blimey. Where did *that* come from?

“Isn’t he gorgeous?” Millie says dreamily, as all too quickly, the boy runs off again.

“Shhh, Mil, Jamie’s right there,” I remind her guiltily. After all, *my* boyfriend’s right there too.

“Oh, big whoop. I’m only looking and they aren’t bothered. We could talk about anything and they wouldn’t pay any attention. Watch.” Millie raises her voice. “There’s a pink donkey somersaulting over the fence!”

The boys carry on chatting, completely oblivious.

“See? Told you. Nothing,” Millie says. “His name’s Zach.

He moved here from Cornwall and has the sexiest arms I've *ever* seen. I think he's so buff from all the surfing. He's in my maths set and even makes algebra appealing. I could literally watch him all day and not get bored."

"You're unbelievable," I say, giggling.

"Hey." Jamie turns abruptly. His forehead crinkles in bewilderment as we stare at him guiltily. "Mills, did you just say something about a somersaulting donkey? What are you going on about now?"

Danny catches my eye, and we both start grinning.

So what if I've never felt anything for him like I just felt for Zach? It doesn't matter, because it's not as if it means anything.

I don't *think* so, anyway. Does it?

