

Sophie McKenzie

Three's a Crowd

by the Richard and Judy's Children's Books Winner

Author of
award-winning
bestseller

**GIRL,
MISSING**



THREE'S A CROWD

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SIMON AND SCHUSTER

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The plan

D'you want to know the worst thing about having a totally amazing girlfriend?

What's he on about, you're asking? How can there be a worst thing? How can there even be a downside? Especially with Eve. She's beautiful and sexy and fun and sweet.

And she likes me back.

Well, there *is* a downside.

It's all the other guys. The ones who wish they were with her instead of me.

I guess she gets about six boys a day hitting on her. And that's just an ordinary school day. If we go to a party or a club I can't leave her for a minute without them swarming round her like wasps.

Drives me mad.

Eve doesn't see it. She says they're just chatting. Being

friendly. But I know better. I know they don't care about her, like I do. I know they're just after one thing.

Most blokes are like that. Eve's previous boyfriend, Ben, was always trying to get her to do it with him. Yeah, Ben. He didn't like it when he found out I'd been seeing Eve.

But that's another story. I don't want to think about all that. I just want to think about Eve.

Eve and me.

It was the last week of the summer term. Eve and I were meeting after school in the Burger Bar. I like it there – they play good music and sell big portions at cheap prices.

I walked in a bit late, thanks to a heated discussion with my form teacher who says if I don't work harder I'm going to fail all my GCSEs next year. I saw Eve straight away. I always see her first in any room. That's not some weird, psychic connection by the way. It's her hair. Catches the light – all sleek and blonde.

She was sitting at one of the booths, her head bent over a plastic sheet menu. I could just make out someone else's arm on the other side of the table. A male arm. Whoever it was must have been sitting slouched down – I couldn't see his head and shoulders – but there was definitely someone there. Someone flirting with her. As usual.

I strode over, psyching myself up for the necessary

get-out-of-here-this-is-my-girlfriend look I was about to give.

Then I saw who it was. Ryan. I breathed a sigh of relief. Ryan's pretty much my best mate. He's going out with my older sister, Chloe. In fact that's how we got to know each other – when he was after Chlo and I was after Eve a few months ago.

“Hi, Luke.” Ryan grinned up at me from his bench. “Eve and I were just talking about you.”

“Oh, yeah?” I looked over at Eve. She was blushing, like Ryan had really embarrassed her. God, she had to have the sexiest, poutiest mouth in the history of the world.

I couldn't look at that mouth without wanting to kiss it.

I slid in beside her and leaned across. *Mmmn.*

I could hear Ryan making puking noises across the table. I didn't care. Eve pushed me gently away. Her eyes sparkled up at me.

“So what were you saying about me?” I asked.

“Um . . .” Eve looked away.

“Wait till Chloe gets here.” Ryan nudged Eve across the table. “I've just called her. She'll be here any minute.”

I frowned, wondering what was going on. Then Eve took my hand and I forgot everything else.

“You're here early,” I said. This was a running joke between us. Eve is always, always late for everything.

“I *was* early, actually.” Eve smiled.

“Eve has news,” Ryan said, looking like he was trying not to laugh.

“What?” I said.

“Wait for Chloe,” Ryan said again.

“Jesus, Ry. What’s going on?”

“Come on, man. You know Chloe. She’ll be pissed off if she’s left out of it.”

This was undoubtedly true, though not what I was asking. Chloe’s not a bad sister. But she’s an unbelievably moody human being. Ryan is the only person I know who has any kind of influence over her. And even he struggles sometimes.

It was at this point that Chloe turned up.

Ryan smiled. “Hey Pig Baby,” he drawled in an exaggerated American accent.

“Hi, Skankface.” Chloe grinned as she leaned over to kiss him.

Eve and I exchanged glances. Neither of us really get the way Ry and Chloe seem to enjoy being rude to each other. Sometimes they even have these terrible rows, where one or both of them completely lose it. You think they’ll never speak again. But the next time you see them, they’re back to being all loved-up.

Eve and I don’t do that. We’re totally into each other. Always.

“So what’s this big deal news?” I said.

“It’s my dad,” Eve said. “He wants me to spend the whole of August at his new hotel in Mallorca.”

I blinked at her, my stomach twisting into a knot. “The *whole* of August?”

“Yeah.” Eve stared down at the table. I guessed she knew what I was thinking. A whole month apart. And I was so looking forwards to having loads of time together – the summer holidays about to start. And now we’d have . . . what . . . ten days before the end of July – then she’d have to go.

“Sounds cool,” Chloe said. “Will your dad expect you to work at the hotel?”

Ryan broke into a fit of coughing.

“Yeah,” Eve explained, still staring at the table. “I’ll have to help out waiting tables and sorting things out by the pool and maybe even working in the crèche . . . but I guess it’s still four weeks in Spain.”

My heart was sliding down into my shoes. I was wrong. Four weeks away from me and she didn’t even seem all that bothered.

Ryan recovered from his coughing fit.

“Does your dad run the place, then?” he said.

Eve nodded.

“Lots of staff?”

“Yeah – especially over the summer. He gets masses of English tourists, so. . .”

“...he has to hire extra help,” Chloe finished. She raised her eyebrows. “Mmmn. Imagine the buff Spanish pool boys.”

I glared at her.

“Bet the girls are hot, too,” Ryan added. “Go on, Eve.”

Eve paused. “Actually my dad doesn’t usually hire girls to work for him. He says they’re too distracting for the male staff. And sometimes there are problems with the guests too. You know, middle-aged men trying it on. It’s supposed to be a family place, so my dad tries to . . . to stop trouble starting by not hiring girls.”

“Yet he’s happy for *you* to go and work there?” I said, unable to control the angry shake in my voice. The idea of Eve being away for four weeks was bad enough. But knowing she’d be the only girl working in a hotel full of hot, pervy, Spanish guys and lecherous British tourists was unbearable. “What about your mum? Won’t she mind?”

But I already knew the answer to that. Eve’s mum was nice, but basically pathetic. As far as I could gather from the stories Eve told me, she’d never stood up to Eve’s dad once.

Eve wouldn’t meet my eyes. I stared at her, Ryan and Chloe forgotten. Her lips twitched. *Jesus*. Was she laughing at me?

I sprang to my feet, feeling utterly humiliated. “Great,”

I said sarcastically. “Hope you have a great time. Send me a postcard.”

I turned to walk away. Eve grabbed my wrist.

“Luke,” she said. “Stop. We’re just messing around.”

I turned back to her, pulling my arm free. “What?”

I caught sight of Ryan and Chloe – they were leaning against each other, shaking with silent laughter.

“I’m sorry,” Eve said. “Listen, my dad loves girls.” She blushed. “Too much, in fact. I certainly won’t be the only one working there. But that’s not the point.”

“I don’t get it.” I looked from her to Ryan and Chloe.

“Sorry, man.” Ryan grinned. “It was my idea. I called Chloe and told her before you arrived.”

“But. . . ?”

“For God’s sake, Luke,” Chloe sighed. “You are so easy. I mean, have you ever heard of a hotel that refuses to employ women?”

I shrugged, my face burning. It’s not that I can’t take a joke. Just, I don’t like people taking the piss out of the way I feel about Eve.

Especially when Eve does it.

“That’s not all,” Eve reached out for my arm again. “Luke?” I looked at her. Her face was stricken. “I’m really sorry. Listen, it’s brilliant. My dad said I could bring some friends if I wanted. That’s the real news.”

“What is?” I said.

“We’re all invited. You, me, Ry and Chloe. Dad said it was okay. I mean, we’ll have to do a bit of work while we’re there, but we’ll have loads of free time. The staff are mostly around our age and the hotel’s got a virtually private beach. He says it’s beautiful.”

I sat down slowly, letting Eve wrap her arms round my neck.

“You mean we’re *all* going, for all four weeks?” Relief was seeping through my feelings of anger and humiliation, washing them away.

Eve nodded, her eyes sleepily, sexily, inviting me to kiss her.

A smile crept round my mouth.

“If Mum says it’s okay,” Chloe said.

I drank in Eve’s face again. “Oh, I’m sure that’s not going to be a problem.” I moved closer to her lips, suddenly feeling exhilarated. This was better than my wildest dreams. A whole month with Eve. In the same building. Not even having to go home at night. And August in Spain. It would be hot and. . .

“Luke.” Chloe’s voice barged into my mental picture of Eve sprawled across a beach in a bikini.

“What?” I said irritably.

“Put it away, dumb ass. The waitress is waiting to take your order.”