

ROCK BAND

MUSIC and Misfits

For everyone with big dreams

LITTLE TIGER

An imprint of Little Tiger Press Limited

1 Coda Studios, 189 Munster Road, London, SW6 6AW

www.littletiger.co.uk

Imported into the EEA by Penguin Random House Ireland

Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin, D02 YH68

www.littletigerpress.com

A paperback original

First published in Great Britain in 2025

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Illustrations copyright © Stephanie André, 2025

ISBN: 978-1-78895-751-9

eISBN: 978-1-78895-778-6

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in the UK.

STP/3400/0634/0325



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LEAH OSAKWE

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LITTLE TIGER
LONDON



CHAPTER 1

Sabrina Strikes a Chord

I'm in after-school detention. And I'm not happy about it at all. Being locked up in a classroom that reeks of damp and dog breath isn't exactly my idea of a good time.

Francesca Gibbons from Year Eleven sits to my left. I heard she once ripped a hefty history textbook in two – with her *teeth*. She's strong and heavy-handed, captain of the girls' rugby team. Apparently she's not one to be messed with, but I don't care. She won't stop cracking her knuckles and their loud pops send bolts of ice up and down my spine.

"Please stop," I hiss, glaring at her.

She whips her head round to glare right back at me, her thick eyebrows pressed together in rage. Anyone else would back down if they could feel the heat from Francesca's stare scorching their skin. But not me. I'm not scared of her – or anyone – so we stay like this for a while, glowering at each other with venom in our eyes. Eventually, she looks away, muttering something cruel under her breath. I smile secretly, triumphant.

I don't know the girl to my right. Her shoes are covered in mud, but she's still got her feet up on the chair in front

of her, leaning back in her seat like we're in sunny Mexico, not dreary Park Cross.

"Chloe. Legs. Down. Now."

Mr Ashby's in charge: he's gruff and miserable, with the voice of a bored robot. Sitting at the front of the class behind a rickety desk, he chomps on a limp egg-and-cess sandwich. Some slop escapes his mouth, dropping on to his tie, but he swipes it up with a stubby finger and devours it in one loud slurp.

It's the first week back at Kirkland School for Girls after the Christmas holidays and everything's grey.

Like ... *everything*.

The overcast sky, the 'chicken' they served at lunchtime, even the wisps of hair clutching on to Mr Ashby's scalp! The two-week break literally zoomed past and now I'm back like I never left.

It's probably obvious that I'm not the biggest fan of school. If I could only do one lesson until I leave forever, it'd be music. That's because I'm a singer. Singer-songwriter, actually. Yep – I write my own stuff, and when I finally leave school and move to London or Manchester, I plan to make it as a solo artist. And the first stop on my world tour? Los Angeles. It's hot there, with gigantic palm trees and sandy beaches – a thousand times better than Park Cross.

And a MILLION times better than this detention.

It's actually Kia's fault I'm here. I adore Kia, she's my best friend, but she should totally be here instead of me. She was the one talking in assembly, but like a good friend I took the fall. That's what friends are for. And honestly,

me and Kia are more like sisters. Sometimes I feel like she's more of a sister than my *actual* sister, Zaya. We even look alike. She's a tad taller, with slightly rounder cheeks and fuller lips, but apart from that, we're basically twins.

There's a stain on Mr Ashby's tie now. I fix my eyes on it, hoping that if I don't look at the clock, time will speed up and I can zip out of this place for good.

Suddenly, the classroom door flings open with a great *whoosh* and everyone looks up, startled. Even Chloe sits up straight, like there are hot coals under her bottom.

It's Sabrina.

Sabrina Ogwe.

She bursts into the room in a vivid flash of electric-blue braids and strawberry bubblegum, which pops as she slams the door behind her.

Mr Ashby points to the seat in front of me, his thin lips pursed. "Sabrina. Sit."

Francesca, Chloe and I watch as Sabrina stomps to the desk and drops into the seat, huffing noisily. I've never spoken to her before, but I know exactly who she is. Everybody knows who Sabrina is. She's gobby. Rowdy. Rude to the teachers.

Forget a class clown; she's a class *menace*.

I can tell she's a regular here by the way she slouches lazily and gnaws on her gum like she's the only one in the room. She's the kinda person you wouldn't want to make eye contact with even on a *good* day. Like, she'd probably growl at you or something.

But I have to admit ... I love her hair.

I tap her on the shoulder and she spins round to face

me, confusion etched into every crease in her forehead. People clearly don't start conversations with her very often.

"How did you get away with blue hair?" I whisper.

"I didn't." She smirks, chewing loudly. She doesn't bother lowering her voice. "That's why I'm here."

"Sabrina. Quiet," Mr Ashby grumbles to the back of her head.

She rolls her eyes at me and pulls a funny face, pretending to mimic him. I snort. She's kinda funny. Who knew?

"It's cool." I grin. "I'm glad this room isn't so grey any more."

I bet I could pull off blue hair if I wanted to, but it's a bit too ... *out there* for me, you know? The furthest I've gone with my tight dark curls is dying them a light brown (Kia and I thought it'd be cool to have the same hairstyle last summer).

"Um ... cheers," Sabrina mumbles, awkwardly picking at the black fingerless glove on her left hand.

She looks uncomfortable, maybe because someone has actually said something *nice* to her. And to be honest, I can't believe *I'm* the one to do it – I don't usually hand out compliments to strangers.

"Why are you here anyway?" she continues. "You're never in detention."

"Oh, you know." I shrug, like it's not a big deal. "Just talking in assembly."

She looks up again and nods. "Cool."

"So, are you gonna take out your braids?"

Sabrina scoffs. “No way. Not till the weekend. I was at the hairdressers for hours, so these *people*,” she spits, shooting daggers in Mr Ashby’s direction, “can put me in detention every day if they want. I couldn’t care less.”

I snigger. I think I *like* her. Yeah, she wears those scarily chunky boots and a permanently sour scowl, and yeah, I’m the complete opposite, with my love for pretty colours and cute trainers, but she’s fearless. Like me.

“Your name’s Galaxy, right?” Sabrina asks.

“Yep,” I reply proudly. I love my name. Just look at any photo of the galaxy and it’ll blow your mind. Seriously. All those stars, sparkles, crystals, colours – precious beyond your wildest imagination. Dad says that’s why I have ‘Star Presence’.

Sabrina pops her bubblegum in amazement. “That’s seriously cool.”

I’m about to agree when Chloe pipes up, giggling. “Guys, look at Mr Ashby.”

Everyone looks towards the grumpy teacher at the front of the class. His chin has drooped to his chest and he’s snoring softly. We all splutter with laughter. Quietly, though. We don’t want to wake him.

Sabrina slowly, silently, lifts herself out of her seat. She puts a finger to her lips, miming at us amused onlookers to be quiet, then tiptoes over to Mr Ashby’s desk. I have no idea what she’s about to do, but she’s a real rebel, so it could be anything.

She grabs his mug, viciously chews her gum until it’s completely mushed, then spews it into his coffee. It lands in the sea of brown liquid with a gentle plop.

Francesca snorts. Chloe gags. I gasp.

I'm horrified – but equally entertained. Sabrina's seriously brave. I'm brave too, but I'd *never* spit the soggy contents of my mouth into a teacher's hot beverage.

Smug as ever, Sabrina saunters back to her desk to collect her bag. She locks eyes with me, her mahogany irises gleaming with mischief. "You coming?"

I've never done something so wild, so rebellious, so ... *impulsive* before.

I'm totally up for it.

I gather my bag and blazer then follow Sabrina out the door, not daring to look back. We tumble out of the classroom, whooping with laughter.

As we sprint down the corridor, a huge blue-and-orange poster sprinkled with silver glitter catches my eye. Well, actually, the words do. I slow down to scan it quickly, squinting so I can get a closer look.

KIRKLAND

TALENT SHOW!!!

FRIDAY 7th FEBRUARY

@ 2.30 p.m.

ALL ACTS WELCOME!

WINNER GETS

A CASH PRIZE!!!

CHAPTER 2

Centre Stage Awaits

No. Way. I stop completely, prompting Sabrina to do the same.

She stares at me, puzzled. "What's wrong?"

"A talent show," I gasp, partly because I'm out of breath, and partly because I can't believe it. The last time there was a talent show at Kirkland, I wasn't even a student here. Sophia Chen won it, and when she left school, she went on to be the lead actress in a huge West End musical! Now it's *my* time to shine, to finally grace the stage, to get a taste of the life I'm destined to live. Golden pound signs flash before my eyes too. The winner gets a cash prize! *A cash prize!* I can start saving for a studio session, or maybe even my very own recording equipment.

"Oh, cool!" Sabrina agrees. "We've gotta go though, Galaxy. Y'know, before Mr Ashby wakes up?"

"Oh yeah. Sorry," I stammer. "Let's go." I almost forgot we were on the run.

Before we shoot off again, I look at the poster one more time, my imagination running wild. As my feet pound the laminate, I make a mental note to sign up for the talent show first thing tomorrow. But for now, I need to focus

on escaping detention without getting caught.

We crash out of the school doors and into the rain.

"I can't believe you just did that!" I shriek with laughter.

Neither of us brought an umbrella, so we run for cover under the bus shelter opposite the school. When we get there, we catch our breath, our giggles fading.

"He deserved it. He hates me," Sabrina pants, rifling through her bag to retrieve a fresh pack of bubblegum. "Want some?"

"Thanks." I take a piece and pop it in my mouth. The fruity sweetness takes over my taste buds as I chew. "I hope he doesn't wake up and realise we're gone!"

"What's he gonna do – admit he fell asleep when he should be supervising us? They'd probably fire him!"

"You're so right."

"Anyway, I'm going that way." She points to the left and shifts her bag further up her shoulder. "Hopefully see you in detention again soon."

I wouldn't set foot back in that soul-snatching dungeon if they paid me, but I grin back. "Yeah. See you later."

I take off in the opposite direction to Sabrina, holding my blazer above my head to shield me from the downpour. I power-walk home, excited to tell Kia about what just happened.

Sometimes Mum finishes work early, but she's not home yet. Dad's still at work too. And thankfully, when I enter the house and call Zaya's name, she doesn't answer. She must be with her gaggle of super-annoying friends.

Anyway, I'm ecstatic she's not here, because now I can sing as loud as I want without anyone yapping at me to

shut up. It's not like I listen anyway, but at least I can get some peace and quiet today. I chuck my sodden blazer and bag on the hallway floor then pad through to the living room and throw myself on the sofa.

My thumb dances across my phone screen to call Kia. She answers on the second ring, as always.

"Hey, what's up?"

"Kia, the funniest thing happened in detention!" I jabber, cheerily chomping on my watermelon-flavoured gum.

Kia and I *love* to gossip, so I can tell she's excited when she asks, "Oooh, what?"

"It was so funny. So, first of all, I had a staring match with Francesca Gibbons!"

"No way. You were in detention with *her*?"

"Yeah. Can you believe it? She was trying to scare me, but *obviously* it didn't work. And she looked away first!"

"Good! She's not scary at all."

"I know. Ha! Anyway, that wasn't the funny part."

"What was?"

"You know Sabrina Ogwe?"

"Ugh, *yeah*. Of course she was there. She's so weird."

My stomach lurches. I should've known Kia would say something like this. The whole school knows Sabrina's ... different. And now that I kinda like her, I just hope Kia won't think the same about me.

"Mm, yeah. So, anyway, she came in from, like, nowhere and SLAMMED the door! And I dunno if you saw her today, but she *literally* has bright blue hair! So, we started talking—"

“You *talked* to her?”

“Um, yeah? She’s kinda funny.”

“Oh, OK.”

I try to ignore Kia’s slight shift in tone and keep going. “Anyway ... then Mr Ashby fell asleep! He was proper snoring and everything!” I stop to chuckle, remembering the loll of his head and the whistle of his snores. “And Sabrina went up to his desk and SPAT her bubblegum into his coffee! Like, she literally spat in his coffee! And then we escaped, and he had no idea cos he was fast asleep! It was *so* funny.”

“Ha ha! No way,” she replies.

My laughter trails off. I’m a little disheartened by the dullness in her voice. I mean, it *does* take quite a lot to make Kia laugh sometimes, but I expected a much better reaction to my story.

“Maybe you had to be there,” I mumble.

“Yeah, I guess.”

There’s a niggling discomfort in the back of my mind. Is she annoyed at me for talking to Sabrina, for having fun without her? I can totally understand that; it’s always just been us. Galaxy and Kia. It must be weird to hear me talk about someone else and how much fun I had with them. Or maybe I’m overthinking. Like I said, it can be hard to make Kia laugh. Sometimes we’ll be watching a funny film and I’ll be doubled over in stitches, while she sits stock-still and straight-faced.

Yeah, that’ll be it.

“Oh, and I dunno if you saw the poster for the talent show, but I’m gonna sign up!” I continue.

Kia gasps. “That’s such a good idea! What’re you gonna sing?”

“Not sure yet. Should I perform one of my own songs or something else?”

“I think something that people know. So they can sing along, y’know? Oh, by the way, I saw Rashaun after school. He was walking in front of me, but I didn’t say anything to him. I swear, he’s the most beautiful person I’ve ever seen in my *life*, Galaxy...”

I let her babble on about Rashaun, her crush from the boys’ school, for the rest of the conversation, although half of my mind is flicking through my Fave Songs playlist, trying to figure out what to sing for the talent show.

When we finish talking, I switch on the TV, clicking straight over to the music channel. This is my favourite part of the day – hogging the remote and bumping to the beats of the songs I love. A kaleidoscope of butterflies dance in my belly every time, because I know that’ll be me one day.

First, the big stage at the Kirkland talent show, then on to the big screen.



The next day, I make a beeline for the talent show poster, zigzagging through the crowd. Everything in my body fizzles with excitement. There’s a sign-up sheet stuck on the wall next to it. So far, I see Lucy Guildford’s name. I know she’s in Year Eleven and, like, tap-dances or something. That’s great and all, but we’ve seen it before. Gemma Miller and Abigail Muza have signed up too.

I don't know who they are or what year they're in, but I'm not worried.

I fumble for the pen in my bag then jot 'Galaxy Rose' on the sign-up sheet, my heart juddering with anticipation. I text Kia to tell her the good news.

Me: I signed up for the talent show!

Kia: Wooooo! Go girl!!!

When I turn round, I spot Sabrina's blue hair. She's standing at the school reception, clutching a slip of orange paper. I cut through the throng of moody students traipsing to their classes towards her. I'm going to be late for English, but I'm desperate to know what's going on. Behind the glass panel, the receptionist, Miss Stewart, chatters away on the phone, barely acknowledging an impatient Sabrina who's sighing heavily, chewing her gum, rolling her eyes.

"Sabrina," I hiss.

She turns to look at me, nostrils flared in anger. Her face softens when she realises it's me. "Oh, hey, Galaxy."

"What's happening? Have you got another detention?"

"They're *suspending* me until I take out my braids," she drones, waving the orange slip in the air.

I gawp at her. "Are you serious?"

She nods, a bitter frown creeping to her lips. "I honestly don't care. Now I get to chill at home for the rest of the week, so whatever."

“What did your mum say? Is she coming to get you?”

“She’s used to it.” Sabrina shrugs. “And no, her stupid boyfriend is picking me up. Mum’s at work.”

Miss Stewart clicks the phone back into place, exhaling noisily. “Yes, Sabrina?” she asks wearily.

Sabrina hurls the orange slip towards her.

Miss Stewart whips the leopard-print glasses off her face and pinches the bridge of her nose, as though the sight of Sabrina is giving her a pulsing headache. She pushes herself out of her seat and marches to the back of the room, ready to meet us out in the foyer and escort Sabrina to Mrs Fisher’s office.

Mrs Fisher is the head teacher. She’s, like, an ice queen or something. When her stick-thin heels click-clack through the corridors, everyone scatters. Being banished to sit outside her office is the *ultimate* punishment. It’s cold there, apparently. Empty. Lonely. Some students never return.

While we wait for Miss Stewart to lead her to her fate, Sabrina lightly nudges me. “Wanna come round on Saturday?”

I’m taken aback. “Really?” I mean, sure, we bonded during detention. She seems to think I’m cool (obviously). But spending time at her *house*? I don’t know. Sabrina and I are just so different. We’re galaxies apart. She belongs to a planet where the aliens are plotting to destroy Earth, and I’m on a planet with candyfloss clouds and lollipop trees. Plus, I do kinda have a lingering feeling that Kia’s not OK with our budding friendship.

Sabrina glances round to check there are no teachers

lurking then sneakily hands me her phone. “Quick. Put your number in. I’ll text you.”

I don’t have time to think. I seize her phone, its screen hideously cracked, and press in the digits. She takes it back, just as Miss Stewart appears beside us, beckoning Sabrina with her hand. “Come on, let’s go.”

Sabrina’s shoulders rise and fall as she lets out a deep, tired breath. She throws me a lazy wave and follows Miss Stewart, dragging her feet towards the frostiness of Mrs Fisher’s office.

“See you later,” I call after her.

When she’s gone, my eyes flit to every corner of the foyer, wondering what Kia would think if she had caught me talking to Sabrina *again*. But she’s nowhere to be seen, and I’m relieved. Even though I’m not doing anything wrong, I would hate for there to be tension with my best friend.

To be honest, there’s no point worrying about it anyway. I’ve made up my mind. I’ll invent an excuse, pretend to be ill on Saturday or something.

I don’t have time for drama when there’s a talent show to win!