

BEAUTY
and the
BIN



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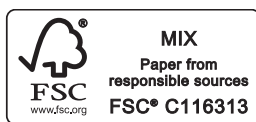
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For John, Ella, and Clara, with love x

CHAPTER ONE

'You have two choices, Laurie. You can either get some food out of the bins to take to the party or you can get back into the car and sulk.'

Laurie got back into the car and sulked.

Unconcerned, her mum picked up the bags. 'Come on, Fern,' she said to Laurie's little sister. 'Last night's rubbish should still be in the containers. We're looking for bagels, salad, strawberries . . .'

'Can I get into the actual bin?' asked Fern, jumping up and down on the spot. Her bracelets, home-made from bottle tops, jangled loudly. 'Like properly inside it? And throw things over to you?'

'But you're the lookout,' said Mum. 'What if the manager comes out and you don't give me the signal in time?'

Laurie pulled her cardigan around her. *Normal people*, she thought, *don't slip around the back of supermarkets and take things out of the bins for free*. She stared out of the window. It was nearly seven o'clock on a Saturday evening and the car park was busy. Shoppers were going through the shiny doors, into the brightly lit aisles to pay for groceries.

Her eyes rested on a girl and her mum – both dressed in this season's statement jeans – who were trying to prise a trolley out of the rack. The mum kept tugging on the handles and then throwing her arms up, panto-style. Laurie couldn't see the girl's face but she was tossing her blonde ponytail.

She's probably laughing, thought Laurie. *Like I'd be, if I hadn't been asked to climb into a bin and splatter myself with yogurt, custard and hummus*. She ran a hand down her jeans. She was wearing her favourite pair – not sausage-tight but not baggy at the knees either.

'Is this about your jeans?' Laurie's mum was back in the car, digging around in the glove compartment. 'I did

ask you to wear old clothes, Lau. I mean, look at me.' She was wearing a sweatshirt with the slogan *Less Carbon, More Carbs!* and jeans that were older than Laurie.

'It's not that,' Laurie said quickly. Her mum was clueless when it came to fashion, but she didn't want to hurt her feelings. Anyway, that was the truth. Old clothes were the least of her problems.

Laurie took a deep breath. 'Look at this place,' she said. 'I know it's nearly closing time but you promised it wouldn't be busy, Mum. And it's packed! We could easily get caught.'

Fern's face appeared at the window. 'For what, though? We're not stealing, are we? We're repurposing.' She pulled a taekwondo pose, with her fists up in front of her face. 'We're garbage guzzlers!'

A hot wave of nervous dread rose up inside Laurie. She still couldn't believe her mum was getting them to do this, to be garbage guzzlers – people who eat discarded food from the bins of supermarkets, cafes and restaurants.

Laurie shook her head. 'And you're not even joking,' she said. 'That's the worst thing.'

'Wellies on, please, Lau,' said her mum.

Laurie couldn't believe this was happening. And to make matters worse, the whole thing was her fault. *Why* had she felt the need to show her family that documentary about food waste, when they already did *so much* to help save the planet? It had just convinced them they could do even more!

In the video, a guy who called himself 'Geoff the Garbage Chef' had been striding across a field, throwing potato peelings on to a barbecue, drinking sour milk straight from the bottle and talking about some chocolate biscuits he'd found in the supermarket bins.

'Open your eyes and fill your bellies!' he'd said. 'Because I've got a challenge for you. Can you go for a day, a week or how about an entire month, without buying food?'

Laurie cringed just thinking about it. Before the video

had even ended, her parents and Fern had signed up to the challenge. Dad had flung open the cupboards to dig out dusty lentils and broken spaghetti and Fern had found a recipe for the weirdest treacle tart ever, which used banana skins instead of pastry.

And now here they were, bin diving.

'There's no need to look so worried, Laurie,' said her mum. 'It's not a swimming pool. You don't actually have to *dive* into the bin.' She laughed. 'Just rummage around a bit and find us something nice to eat.'

Laurie's eyes flicked back to the mum and daughter in the jet-set jeans. Would they think that being a garbage guzzler, or a freegan, or a dumpster diver, or any of those other words that are used to describe people who eat the rubbish, was a criminal offence?

'Look, Mum, I know the supermarket has thrown the food in the bin but Dad says that strictly speaking it still belongs to them so it's illegal to—'

Laurie's mum waved her hands dismissively. 'Tell you what should be illegal, Laurie. Chucking out tons

of bagels a week, that's what.'

'Wasting food is wrong,' said Laurie. 'I care about it too, you know! What I'm saying is, there are other ways to—'

Fern rapped on the back window. She squashed her nose, which was sprinkled in freckles like sesame seeds, up against the glass. 'Let's go.'

Laurie looked at Fern's bright hand-me-down pinafore. Sometimes she secretly wished she was nine years old again and that the mustard dress still belonged to her. She looked at the big heart-shaped patch on the skirt. Laurie had accidentally torn the pinafore when she was climbing a tree, and her mum had patched it with a piece of fabric from one of Laurie's old Babygros.

She wouldn't have minded going into bins so much when she was Fern's age. *But I'm twelve now*, she told herself. *I'm not a kid any more.*

Laurie's face flushed. 'I'm not a pig, either,' she muttered out loud. Then she turned to her mum and said, 'That's what I'm saying. It's not just that I don't want

to get into trouble. I don't want to eat out of bins. Full stop.'

Her mum snapped the glove compartment shut. 'I've found the head torch and the rubber gloves,' she said. 'And Fern's got the walkie-talkies. Right then, staying or coming, Laurie? Final decision.'

'Mum! Were you even listening to me?'

'Yes, Laurie. Oink, oink, oink.'

Mum scrunched up her nose and mouth. Her face was like elastic: she could stretch it into any expression she wanted. Laurie's teeth gritted as her mum started snorting around the dashboard. A bubble of laughter caught in Laurie's throat and she tried to turn it into a cough. The giggle burst out anyway.

'Come on,' said Mum. She opened the car door and stood next to Fern. 'Geoff the Garbage Chef says it's possible to find enough food in one bin dive for a family to eat for a week. When he gets that much, he calls it Garbage Gold! So it can't be hard to find a few extras . . .'

'Go for it, Laurie!' shouted Fern. 'Remember that

slogan from the video? *Garbage guzzling keeps the planet alive, so why not get your next meal from a dumpster dive!*

Fern was so loud that people turned around and stared at them. Including the girl and her mum, who had finally freed a trolley.

It was Charley Keating-Sloss. Only the coolest, richest, most popular girl at school.

Laurie threw herself down in her seat. She yanked her cardigan right over her head, blood thumping with panic.

Had Charley seen her? Did she recognize her? Was she on her way over, ponytail a-swishing, to laugh at Laurie Larksie the Champion Dumpster Diver?

'What's going on?' said Mum.

Breathe, Laurie told herself. *Deep breath. Get a grip.* If Charley did come over (which was unlikely), all she'd see when she looked in the car was a pile of cardigan. There was no evidence they were going bin diving. Laurie could deny everything.

'Explain,' her Mum said.

'Don't look now but there's a girl from school,' said Laurie, her voice muffled. 'Over there with her mum and ...'

Mum turned to look. 'What's wrong with that? We'd love to meet one of your friends. Go on, Lau, give her a wave.'

'No!' said Laurie, more sharply than she meant to. How could she explain to her mum that the thought of Charley – or 'Charr-ley', as Charley herself pronounced it – meeting her family was terrifying?

Brainy, beautiful, with a breezy 'I-got-this' attitude and glossy hair that flowed over her shoulders like golden syrup, Charley Keating-Sloss paraded around Silverdale High School projecting the kind of confidence that comes with nailing the most important fashion decision of the year.

Laurie felt a tight squeezing feeling in her chest. If Charley saw her in her second-hand, recycled, hand-knitted clothes . . . She couldn't even finish the thought.

Her mum's voice lowered. 'I thought you said you

were getting on well with the others – that you'd made lots of new friends?'

'I have. I've told you about my best friends Zainab and Emilia. I'm in Year Seven, Mum! Charley's in Year Nine! I can't go and speak to someone like her.'

'Well, you've missed your chance now, anyway, there's no one beside the trolleys any more.'

Laurie slowly shifted up in her seat and peered through the material of her cardigan. Charley and her Mum had disappeared. So they hadn't seen her.

Yet.

Laurie was thinking fast. She was out of the danger zone for now. But how long would it be before Charley re-emerged? Twenty minutes, half an hour? Laurie looked at the bins. It was getting dark – she could be in and out of there in less than ten minutes.

Her head began to spin. Silverdale High was miles away from home. In fact, it was so far away from Pipson – the village where the Larksies lived – that no one else from Laurie's primary school had gone there. They were

at the local secondary instead. And while Laurie did miss her old friends, she'd loved having a fresh start.

But no one at her new school, not even Emilia and Zainab, had ever met her family. No one knew how obsessed the Larksies were with recycling, reducing and repurposing. This year at Silverdale had been life-changing for her and she wasn't going to let her mum and Fern wreck everything. She wasn't going to turn into Garbage Girl!

She jumped out of the car.

'Oh, well done, love,' Mum patted her on the arm. 'We don't need much. Maybe some salad things. A pudding would be nice . . .'

'Give me the bags,' muttered Laurie, resigned, and with her cardigan over her head she sprinted to the bins.

The first bin was empty. The next one was stuffed with plastic. Laurie ripped the lid off the third and . . .

Jackpot!

The bin was so full of fresh, vibrant produce, it

looked like one of those earth bowls on Instagram. A bed of frilly lettuce leaves was piled high with fruit and vegetables, from red and yellow peppers to packets of diced butternut squash, and hundreds of bite-sized tomatoes, blueberries and raspberries.

With a surge of excitement, Laurie started stuffing the food into the bags. It was like an edible treasure trove! The sight of all that delicious food – just out here and free to take – drove any thought of embarrassment from her head. And as she dug deeper, it got even better. Cinnamon bagels, spicy bean sausages, yogurts, coleslaw and pizzas . . .

‘Any celery or carrots?’ Mum’s voice suddenly came through the walkie-talkie. ‘We could make dips with crudités.’

‘It’s OK, Mum,’ Laurie said quickly. ‘I’ve totally got this.’

Suddenly Laurie heard a noise – there were people going past the edge of the car park, not far from where she was. She ducked down behind the side of the bin and switched her head torch off.

There was chatter, laughter and a rattling sound, as if a can were being kicked along the road. *OK*, thought Laurie, *these people are just on their way to the bus stop or something*. She suddenly remembered about Charley, and started stuffing food in the bags faster than ever. Any minute now she would be back, and then . . .

She dug down into the next layer of the bin – it was full of puff-pastry rolls. She took a look at the price tag and was shocked at how much they cost. No wonder her parents never bought this stuff.

And there were jam doughnuts, biscuits, brownies . . . and a Peppa Pig birthday cake. Laurie grinned – Fern would think it was hysterical. She checked the back of the box. According to the best-before date, the cake didn't go off until midnight.

She grabbed the pizzas and bags of salad, fruit, biscuits and doughnuts and legged it back to the recycling area. She dumped the bags on the ground. 'First load beside the bottle bank,' Laurie hissed into the walkie-talkie. 'Over!' They'd agreed that her mum would

collect them from there and put them in the car, but there was no sign of her.

'Be there in a sec,' said Mum.

When Laurie got back to the bins she spotted a crate lying around. She dragged it over and stood on it to get some extra height. Leaning in, she yanked a couple of plastic bags aside.

With her free hand, she pressed the TALK button on the walkie-talkie. 'Urggh!'

'What is it?' said Mum.

'Looks like someone's emptied a load of tomatoes underneath where the doughnuts were. I think it's pasta sauce or something.' Laurie re-angled the torch on her headband to get a proper look. Sticking out of the sauce was what looked like the humps of the Loch Ness Monster. 'No way! I can see mangoes!'

'Great! Let's do fruity puddings.'

'I was thinking hair conditioner! If you—'

'Don't tell me. Mash up mangoes and spread them on our heads?'

Laurie laughed. She and Fern loved making edible beauty products. It was their favourite thing ever. Using things they found in the kitchen, they whipped up lime and peppermint bath fizz, chocolate orange face masks, wild rose and strawberry moisturizer . . .

And they knew lots of tricks. Whenever Fern had been crying, say, Laurie would pop slices of raw potato over Fern's eyes and cheeks to reduce the puffiness. And once, when Laurie had a spot on her chin, they invented this serum – they called it 'Skin Whisperer' – made from tomatoes and it cleared up, really quickly.

'And post a photo of us . . .'

Laurie grinned. 'On Beauty in the Kitchen. Yes!'

That was the name of her account on School Stories, where only people at your own school could join your group and see your photos.

Laurie loved it. She'd only recently made her social media debut – she'd never had the confidence to post anything at her old school. But School Stories was different, and being in Year 7 was different too.

Now, whenever she and Fern had made a potion, they decorated them with rose petals or chocolate curls and posted the photos. And it had been amazing when a couple of people gave them a like or a share.

'May we have the mangoes?' Laurie asked through the walkie-talkie. 'Or one of them anyway?'

'Of course. Honestly, Lau, when you think of the farmers who grew them and the fact that the produce has been flown halfway round the world . . .'

But Laurie's head had spun off into how the mangoes would be brilliant for her vlog. As she leaned over the bin, throwing the fruit into bags, she imagined mashing up a mango, spreading it on Fern's head and having Fern swish her lovely glossy hair to the camera. Fern's hair was always shiny, but this would really give it some extra oomph. And she could finish the vlog by saying that it doesn't matter if you've not got a mango because it works with bananas and avocados too.

She grinned. This was going to be great. They'd get going on it tomorrow and . . .

Suddenly Laurie's eyes widened. Over in the far corner was the bright packaging of her favourite brand of nut butter. It cost a fortune – her Dad often said it would be cheaper to buy a hazel-tree orchard rather than another jar of it.

And it wasn't only a jar. The side of the crate said *500g tubs X 24*. Laurie did the maths. That single crate cost more than what the Larksies spent on groceries in a fortnight. Never mind a week.

This is it, thought Laurie. *This is #GarbageGold!*

If she managed to get that crate out of the bin, and if that crate really did contain those tubs, then BOOM! Her mum wouldn't make them go bin diving again because they'd have got so much in one go.

But she would need to get really close to it before she could lift it out – she knew it would weigh a ton. Laurie slowly looked around. She was starting to realize that she'd have to actually get into the bin to get the nut butter. She took another look at the sky. It was very late and she hoped that it was so dark no one would

see her whether she got in or not.

Quickly she stood up on tiptoe, which was tricky in her wellies, grasped the side of the bin, swung her legs over and lowered herself into the rubbish. *Ha*, thought Laurie, *I suppose this is what you call a real bin dive!*

She knelt on a sack of potatoes and gently leaned forward, desperately trying not to slip in the garlicky pasta sauce.

Her mum's voice came through the walkie-talkie. 'We should probably get going now, Lau. Do you think you've got enough for the party?'

Laurie put her mouth to the receiver. 'Mum, I can't talk right now! I'm about to . . .' She broke off.

Leaning forward, Laurie shoved the walkie-talkie in her pocket, put her hands on either side of the crate and pulled. There was a nasty slurping noise, as if it were stuck to other things in the bin. She couldn't see much; the battery on her torch was low and the light was fading. With her hands around the crate, she slowly turned towards the side of the bin. She just needed to

get it close enough to the side, so she could climb out of the bin, and then be able to easily reach it when she got out.

But the crate was so heavy that it slipped from Laurie's hands as she got it in position. With a thump it fell back into the bin. The second that happened, the sack underneath Laurie split, and the potatoes burst out.

It was like being in a ball pit where all the balls are mushy vegetables or doughnuts that are squashing beneath your feet, and you're falling further and further down. Laurie couldn't get a footing on anything, and in the panicky seconds that followed she toppled forward and fell splat into the pasta sauce.

'Aaarrggghh!' she yelled aloud.

Laurie flailed about for what felt like ages. In the end, she was forced to do a sort of breast-stroke action to wade through the discarded food. There was no way she was leaving the hazelnut butter, though. Not after all that. She threw it over the side of the bin, like sandbags

out of a hot air balloon, and clambered out.

She strode back to her mum, who was by the car, pieces of mayonnaise-covered carrot and cabbage falling off her jeans.

'What happened? I thought I heard a shout but I wasn't sure if it was you.'

'Well, it was!' Laurie threw the crate of nut butter on the ground. 'I fell over, Mum, and it was absolutely disgusting . . . but it's over.'

Mum put her hand on Laurie's shoulder. 'Poor you. I've got some tissues in the car . . .'

Laurie pulled at her top – the pasta sauce was making her T-shirt stick to her skin. 'Did you hear me, Mum?'

'I think the whole car park heard you, Laurie.'

Laurie triumphantly held up a tub of hazelnut butter.

'Way to go, Lau!' said Mum. 'Is that what I think it is?'

'Garbage Gold!' said Laurie.

Laurie peeled her rubber gloves off – carefully, so she didn't drip any more bin juice on herself – and opened it. It was fudgy, thick and creamy. Even though she was

covered in pasta sauce and bits of vegetables, she was also thinking about making hazelnut bites, with layers of chocolate, hazelnut butter and biscuit.

Suddenly Laurie started to shiver. Her wet T-shirt was making her cold in the night air. She didn't want to touch her clothes, so she gave herself a shake, trying to flick the food off. That released the smell even more.

'Urggh! I absolutely reek of garlic!'

Laurie suddenly felt tears prickling at the back of her eyes. The triumph of finding the hazelnut butter was quickly being replaced by the shock of falling over and swimming in rubbish. *Look at me: I'm a total, stinking MESS!*

'Come on, let's get you home,' said her mum. She put her arm around Laurie, and squeezed her tight. 'And into the bath before bed . . .'

Just then, Laurie caught sight of Fern. She was standing near the exit of the supermarket, making crosses with her fingers.

'Do you know what she's up to?' Mum tucked some

boxes of pizzas under her elbows. She looked like a duck with huge cardboard wings.

'Maybe she thinks I look like a vampire. Because I've got blood-red sauce down me.'

Laurie began a swaying walk. She wandered away from her mum and towards Fern, with her arms outstretched.

At that exact moment, Charley and her mother swung around the corner with their loaded trolley, and came face to face with Laurie.