



CHAPTER 1

NICK LOVES JESSIE

I doodled Jessie's name on my hand in biro, then I drew love hearts and flowers all around it. I'd written it on my arms too, and down both my legs. I was getting really good at it.

“Oh, Jessie!” I said with a sigh. “Love of my life, light of my soul ...”

“Nick.”

I looked up. My best friend, Frank, was prodding me with his elbow and shaking his head, as usual.

“Nick?” he said. “Do you *have* to do that? People are looking at us.”

Frank was right. Everyone on the bus to school was staring at me – including the driver. I could hear cars honking behind us.

“Stare all you want!” I cried, leaping up and waving my inky arms. “I LOVE Jessie, and I don’t care who knows it!”

It was true. I’d been in love with Jessie Stone ever since the first day she walked into my classroom, looked me in the eyes and asked me to get out of her way. Ever since that precious moment, my feelings had grown stronger and stronger! Jessie was clever, popular and the best actor our school had ever seen. It was our destiny to fall in love, get married, say our vows on top of a mountain somewhere ...

“Nick, sit down!” snapped Frank as he dragged me back to my seat. “Why do you always have to be so over the top?”



That was Frank all over. We'd been best friends since Nursery, but he'd never understood my sensitive, passionate side. He was always trying to stop me doing totally normal things, like writing Jessie epic love poems, or filling her front garden with a thousand red roses, or spelling out her name in chocolates on her desk.

"There's nothing wrong with being romantic," I said.

"You're not being romantic, you're being creepy!" said Frank. "You don't know anything about Jessie. You never even talk to her!"

I frowned. "That's not true. We talk every day!"

"She *has* to talk to you," said Frank. "You're the lunch monitor."

I sighed. "She gave me her tray yesterday. Her *tray*. I'll never forget what she said when

she handed it to me: 'Put this in the bin, Rick.' Can you believe that? She knows my name! Sort of."

Frank's glasses steamed up. That always happens when he's annoyed.

"Nick – wake up. It's never going to happen. Jessie doesn't know you exist. And everyone knows she likes Blake!"

No surprises there – *everyone* liked Blake. He was the coolest boy in school, with great hair and fantastic clothes. He never said or did anything interesting, but people still thought he was amazing. He could stand up in Assembly and wet himself, and everyone would say, "Nice one, Blake" or, "Great wee, Blake" or, "Why don't you wet yourself at my house this weekend, Blake?"

"And even if Jessie *didn't* like Blake," said Frank, "she's leaving this year ... remember?"

“OF COURSE I REMEMBER!” I wailed.

Everyone turned to stare at me again.

Frank was so embarrassed, he hid behind his bag. I couldn't help shouting. Jessie was leaving at the end of term to go to drama school and it *hurt*. The pain was still so deep and so raw. In less than two months, the love of my life would be gone for ever!

“Face it, Nick – it's over!” said Frank. “You have to forget about her!”

I shook my head. How could I forget about Jessie? I'd cried for five whole days when I heard she was leaving, and so had our drama teacher, Miss Plant. After all, New Forest Academy was losing its best actor! Jessie'd had the main part in every school play, and this term's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would be her final performance ...

And that was how I'd come up with the best idea of my life.

I clapped my hand on Frank's back and grinned.

“That's where you're wrong, Frank! As it so happens, I've been working on a secret plan to win Jessie's heart – a plan so brilliant, it can't fail!”

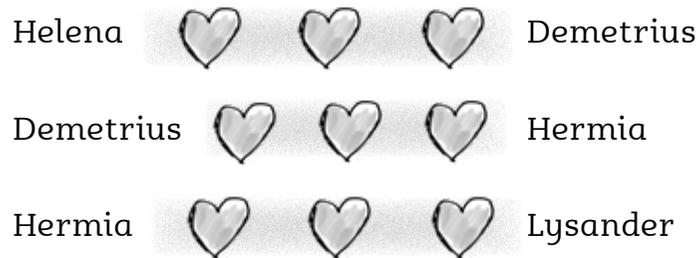
The bus pulled up to the stop, and I jumped out of my seat and ran through the school gates. Frank ran after me.

“Secret plan? What secret plan? Nick, what are you talking about?!”

I smiled. The plan had only come to me last week, but it was genius. “Remember the other day when I made you audition for a part in the school play with me ...?”

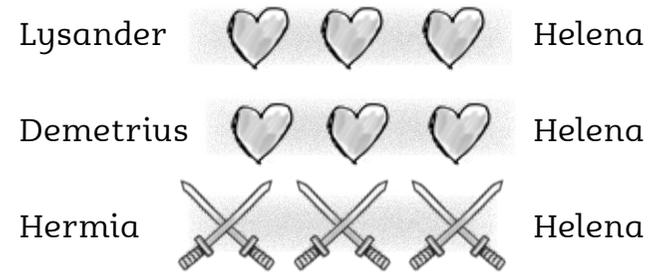
A Midsummer Night's Dream is all about people falling in love with each other. Helena loves a boy called Demetrius, but he's set to marry her best friend Hermia. Hermia

doesn't want to marry Demetrius because in secret she's in love with another boy named Lysander ... it's all very complicated.



They all run into a forest and fall asleep, and that's when things get *really* complicated. A naughty fairy called Puck tries to help them out and uses magic to make Demetrius fall in love with Helena ... but Puck gets the two boys mixed up! So instead of Demetrius falling in love with Helena, *Lysander* falls in love with her. That makes Hermia mad, so Puck has to fix things ... but this time Puck makes Demetrius fall in love with *Helena* too by accident! Remember – Helena already has Lysander chasing after her,

crazy with love, and Hermia is so angry she and Helena end up fighting!



See, I told you it was complicated!

Luckily it all gets sorted in the end. At last everyone is happy and matched up, and they all celebrate by going to a big wedding.

There are lots of other characters, too – like an idiot named Bottom, whom Puck turns into a donkey for a joke. He's not important, just a terrible actor who puts on a play for the wedding with his friends, and it's so bad that everyone laughs at them!

I didn't care about any of those stupid joke characters – what I cared about were the main romantic boy parts. Jessie was bound to get cast as one of the girls, Hermia or Helena. If I could get cast as Demetrius or Lysander, I'd get *weeks* of rehearsing love scenes with her! I would amaze her with my acting skills, and Jessie would finally understand that we're a perfect match, and fall head over heels in love with me, and forget all about leaving school, and we could get married on a mountain somewhere. Simple!

By the time I finished telling him about the plan, Frank's glasses were so steamed up they looked like they'd been covered in Tippex.

"Nick," he moaned, "that is the *stupidest* plan I've ever heard! Jessie's not going to fall in love with you just because you're a good actor!!"

I shook my head. "Wrong again, Frank! This is my chance to show her my sensitive, romantic side. I'm sick of her treating me

like a big joke while guys like Blake get all the attention – it's time for my turn in the spotlight!" I grabbed his arm. "Quick! Miss Plant will have put up the cast list. Let's see which part she gave me!"

Frank groaned. "Fine – but if it doesn't work, promise me you won't get upset and start wailing again ..."

Frank didn't need to worry – I had aced my audition, saying my lines as loudly as I could, waving my hands a lot and crying real tears, with snot and everything. Miss Plant said she had the *perfect* part for me. That must mean I was Demetrius or Lysander!



Sure enough, the cast list was up outside the drama studio. I pushed aside the crowds, desperate to see which parts everyone had:

Ruby HERMIA
Jessie HELENA

I gasped – Jessie was Helena! That was perfect – she had romantic scenes with Demetrius *and* Lysander! I looked down to see which boy I had been cast as:

Blake..... DEMETRIUS
Dom LYSANDER

I blinked. “Wait – what’s going on? Where’s my name?”

“It’s, er ... down there,” said Frank quietly.

He pointed down the list – *right* down. My heart froze. There was my name all right, but it wasn’t next to the part I was expecting.

Nick BOTTOM